

Periodical

# COLLEGE ENGLISH

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# COLLEGE ENGLISH

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# COLLEGE ENGLISH

Vol. 4

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No. 5

## ROBERT SHERWOOD AND HIS TIMES

OSCAR JAMES CAMPBELL<sup>1</sup>

The business of a dramatist is "to awaken the king that dwells in every humble man, the hero in every coward." In these words, taken from a little essay entitled "The Vanishing Dramatist," Robert Sherwood defines a playwright's duty. The sentence also gives us Sherwood's creed and his attitude toward his public, particularly that taken in his later dramas. Even Archibald MacLeish would find it inappropriate to brand a dramatist with such a program as "irresponsible," for Sherwood's sense of duty to his profession and to his age has always been high.

Yet, since the appearance of *There Shall Be No Night* in 1940, Sherwood has himself joined the ranks of his vanishing dramatists. And American morale in this hour of national peril is the poorer for his silence. For in his last plays, notably *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* and *There Shall Be No Night*, he had the faculty of making his absorbing works a tonic and an inspiration to all who saw them on the stage. Young and old left the theater willing to face the chaotic contemporary world with such courage and intelligence as they could command. Without employing the vagaries of fantasy or fash-

ioning arbitrary allegories, Robert Sherwood brings the meaning of his plays back to the business and bosoms of all of us who struggle toward the light in this December of 1942.

But it was from a far corner of cynicism and dejection that he came to the inspiriting idealism of his later works. For his mind followed step by step a change and growth in ideals that characterized the entire generation to which he belongs. Like him, thoughtful and patriotic Americans of the 1920's and 1930's passed from an assertive selfishness through disillusionment and despair to the courage and the self-sacrifice that intelligent idealism demands today.

His first play, the *Road to Rome*, first acted in January, 1927, thus naturally seemed a compound of flippancy and cynicism. A modern comedy in ancient dress, it has for its plot Hannibal's conquest of Rome. Sherwood treated Hannibal, Fabius (the Roman dictator), and Amytis, his wife, with the kind of disillusioned realism made popular about the same time by John Erskine in *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. The play, brilliantly acted by Philip Merivale and Jane Cowl, was a great hit. No wonder. It was perfectly attuned to the mood of the hour, and it was constructed with

<sup>1</sup> Professor of English, Columbia University.

the astonishing technical skill which seems from the first to have been Sherwood's for the asking.

By 1926 Sherwood had become a successful journalist, writing criticism of motion pictures for four different publications. The reason he now gives for the composing of his first play has a twist of the same cynicism which informs the work itself. "I was about to be thirty years old," he writes, "and I had read somewhere . . . that all young newspaper men promise themselves they will write that play or that novel before they're thirty and the next thing they know they're forty and still promising." He takes the same flippant attitude toward his technique. "I tried every style of dramaturgy—high comedy, low comedy, melodrama, romance (both sacred and profane), hard-boiled realism, beautiful writing, and of course I inserted a message. That message was that I was opposed to war." In a sense this is all true, but Sherwood neglects to add that he wrote supremely well in each one of these styles. He has not neglected, however, to furnish us with an explanation of the brilliance of his success. The truth is that the intensity of his cynical gaiety is a measure of the intensity of his disillusionment during what he stigmatizes as "a decade of hypocrisy, corruption, crime, glorification of greed, and depravity."

For Sherwood was a bitterly disappointed idealist. Rejected for military service by both the Army and the Navy in the first World War because of his great height—he is six feet, four inches tall—he entered the Canadian Expeditionary Force as a private, was wounded and severely gassed. During his recovery in the hospital he lay between an Australian who was terribly burned by liquid fire and a South African Jew with a ma-

chine-gun bullet lodged in the base of his spine. The poor fellow would never walk again. The three disabled veterans of utterly different traditions and utterly different culture came to the same conclusions. They were suckers to have been caught in war, the supreme idiot's delight. They felt passionately that war was a hideous injustice and that no man had the right to call himself civilized as long as he believed that another world war could be conceivably possible. As a result of this conviction Sherwood became internationally minded and convinced that the first step in creating international order was a union of English-speaking people.

Then a strange change took place in his mental outlook. He became convinced by the vigorous articles of George Harvey that the League of Nations was utterly impracticable. He agreed, he says, with Henry Cabot Lodge that Article XVI stank; so he played his part in the great betrayal by casting his first vote as an American citizen for Warren Gamaliel Harding. This queer reversal had a profound and lasting effect upon his prevailing emotional attitudes. The deepest of mental disturbances takes place when an idealist turns to mock his most generous impulses. It was to escape from this inner catastrophe that Sherwood poured out in bitter gaiety all the discomfort aroused by his thwarted hopes.

In October, 1929, Sherwood wrote *Waterloo Bridge*, a drama founded on his own observation of "blacked out, hungry London in 1917." The plot is so hackneyed that most of the critics had nothing but scorn for the piece. In truth, at bottom it is merely the old, old story of the prostitute whom the nice young man mistakes for the maiden of his dreams. This time the innocent fellow is a Ca-

nadian soldier who has just been released from a hospital. He is tired, lonely, and discouraged. This fact gives the time-worn sentimental tale a setting which relieves it of almost all of its facile pathos. Despite its banal plot the drama made so deep an impression on me that though I saw it fully thirteen years ago I can still recapture its tone of utter despair.

The desolation of the soldier was projected upon the stage by the great arc of the bridge which filled the proscenium with gray gloom. In this unreal half-light of a world in the process of mournful self-immolation the soldier meets the prostitute. And the encounter ennobles both. In the midst of an air raid the girl tries to conquer the man's reluctance to go back into the fight. But he resists her persuasion because his deepest nature revolts against the evil futility of war. The wholesale slaughter has in itself no meaning. It is important only as a symptom of the desperate disease from which all civilization is suffering. He cries:

"What's the war, anyway? It's that guy up there in his aeroplane. What do I care about him and his bombs? What do I care who he is, or what he does, or what happens to him? That war's over for me. What I've got to fight is the whole dirty world. That's the enemy that is against you and me."

Sherwood, too, was through with war. So was the rest of his generation. But only a few shared his interest in cleansing the dirty world which had bred the foul thing. The majority tried to forget the whole business in easy getting and riotous spending of money. Sherwood, certain that the heedless crowd was rushing blindly to the abyss of another war, viewed the spectacle with grim despair. This was the personal feeling which expressed itself in the gloomy defiance of *Waterloo Bridge*.

*Reunion in Vienna*, written in 1931, owes much to the brilliance and calculated naughtiness of the Hungarian dramatist Ferenc Molnar. It sounds like a clever variant of Molnar's *The Guardsman*, a comedy in which Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne had recently triumphed. They took the leading roles in Sherwood's drama, to which they brought the skilful comic technique which they had applied to Molnar's play. This combination of talents seemed ten years ago to establish a new frontier in American comedy. At last we had a playwright who knew how to amuse sophisticated theatergoers in the ironic realistic manner of the best of Continental dramatists.

*Reunion in Vienna* makes merry over the plight of a famous Viennese psychoanalyst. Before her marriage his wife had been the mistress of a harum-scarum prince of the House of Hapsburg. Returning to Vienna after an absence of some years, the prince tries to persuade the lady that he still has so secure a place in her heart that she cannot successfully terminate his amorous lease upon it without spending one more night with him. The husband, a martyr to his science, dares not forbid his wife from undertaking this experiment, for he fears that his prohibition might have disastrous effects on her love for him. So he tells her that she must herself make the crucial decision. The audience never is told what she does. Nor is the husband. In the last scene we see the lady and the prince at breakfast the next morning in very gay spirits. We can only guess what has happened. And we, like the husband, can only suspect that the experiment, if it has been made, may have not at all effected the cure described by the prince with so much ironic sincerity.

Sherwood says that it was not his intention to write the gay romantic com-

edy that *Reunion in Vienna* turned out to be. He started out, so he reports, with the intention of composing a satire on science, the false god of everybody's idolatry. He would show a scientist hoist with his own petar. And that is what happens to the psychoanalyst. He clings to his formulas in the face of common sense and human experience and, like the victims of hundreds of farces, cannot decide whether he is a cuckold or not. For simpler audiences of five hundred years ago a pair of horns would have been produced from the wings to evoke a final spasm of mocking laughter.

But that was not the temper of the first years of the depression. Then thoughtful men could see that they were caught, as Sherwood says, in a no man's land between a ghastly wreckage of burnt bridges and a future of "black doubt, punctured by brief flashes of ominous light." The favorite defense against this horrible reality in America was half-hearted, shrill cynicism. In such a time there is not enough conviction abroad to produce satire. So the ridicule of science in *Reunion in Vienna* was lost in the cynical atmosphere which pervades the entire play.

His next play, *The Petrified Forest*, produced in 1935, is an allegory of the dissolution of the values of the civilized world. This is the first play in which Sherwood writes about contemporary America. The work is expertly composed, literate melodrama, showing what Brooks Atkinson once called the author's "relish for buccaneering excitement." It also reveals Sherwood's humorous appreciation of all sorts of Americans and, above all, his queer fondness for romance. A work composed of so many sure-fire theatrical devices could not fail to thrill

audiences everywhere. The play was a great success.

But Sherwood gave the melodrama a deeper meaning. *The Petrified Forest* is the graveyard of civilization. The filling station is a little picture of the great world which seemed in 1935 to be going to pieces before Sherwood's very eyes. Squier represents intelligence, which, shorn of positive beliefs, has evaporated into futile and neurotic posturing. He tells Gaby what is causing the collapse of civilization: "It's Nature hitting back. . . . She's fighting back with strange instruments called neuroses. She's deliberately afflicting mankind with the jitters. . . . She's taking the world away from the intellectuals and giving it back to the apes."

*Idiot's Delight*, written in 1936, is another didactic melodrama. It is an anti-war and anti-Fascist play depicting the outbreak of the second World War. It is also an expression of a negative attitude toward the world's madness. War is the brutal expression of the disintegrating forces of our world, about which Sherwood wrote an allegory in *The Petrified Forest*. The play shows, on one hand, that war is foolish and horrible and, on the other, that men are too immature and too emotional to adopt any plan for abolishing it.

The scene is laid in a resort hotel high in the Italian Alps. There Italy's declaration of war against France entraps Harry Van, the head hoofer of a vaudeville troupe; his dancing girls; a German scientist; and an international munitions magnate and his mistress (Lynn Fontanne). She now passes herself off as a Russian but is an erstwhile vaudeville performer who once spent the night with Harry Van in Nebraska, U.S.A. Given these characters in this situation, Sher-

wood was able to show the most astounding theatrical virtuosity of his career. He employs almost every trick of stagecraft known to vaudeville, melodrama, farce, and romance. No modern play can give an audience more varied or more lively entertainment. In spite of all the gags and superficial sparkle of the dialogue, the author develops very impressively his anti-war theme.

Harry Van, the itinerant small-time showman, is the only one in the play who shows faith in the common man—faith that his desire "for peace on earth, good will to men will eventually inherit the earth." This faith is American and, as Sherwood confesses, was his own. So it is appropriate that while the bombs crash at the end of the play Harry and Irene, left alone in the shattered hotel, should raise their voices in loud singing of "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

When Sherwood wrote *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* he had come to believe that America could not adopt a policy of appeasement toward Nazi Germany. He saw that Lincoln in his prairie years faced exactly the same problem of appeasement and war and that only after strong misgivings and deep reluctance did he enlist in the great struggle. Besides, Lincoln's life seemed to him

a veritable allegory of the democratic spirit with its humble origins, its inner struggles, its seemingly timid policy of "live and let live" and "mind your own business," and its slow awakening to the dreadful problems of reality.

Sherwood approached the career of the sad, self-distrustful, mystical Lincoln of Herndon letters and papers with his art purged of all the tricks of the expert stage technician. No rattle of melodrama or of farce disturbs the dignity of this stately chronicle history of a national hero. The dramatist makes his points with the sim-

plest and quietest of means. Yet the situations in *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* are among the most touching and poignant in modern American drama.

Some critic has said that all the best speeches in the drama were ghost-written, meaning that they are composed of Lincoln's own words. While the play was in rehearsal during September, 1938, the Munich crisis occurred. Soon after, Sherwood showed Raymond Massey, who was to become to millions of Americans a reincarnation of the great emancipator, a passage from the famous Peoria speech of 1854. They both saw at once that it had a bearing on the current political situation in America and decided to incorporate it into the speech that Sherwood had written to serve as Abe Lincoln's part in his debate with Douglas. A few sentences had a peculiar relevancy when applied to the ordinary Americans who then were saying, "If the Germans want Naziism and the Italians fascism, that is their business, not ours." Though Lincoln was speaking of compromise with slavery, he might have been talking of isolationists when he condemned the "complacent policy of indifference to evil," and added "That policy I cannot but hate. . . . I hate it because it deprives our republic of its just influence in the world and enables the enemies of free institutions everywhere to taunt us as hypocrites."

Sherwood was wise to restrict the action of his drama to one phase of Lincoln's life. For the great impressiveness of the play's concentrated action was enhanced by every spectator's knowledge of Lincoln's subsequent trials and his final martyrdom. From this reservoir of feeling every audience flooded the creature of Sherwood's imagination with all the emotions which cluster about the melan-

choly figure of the later portraits. Sherwood's triumph is that he added depth and understanding to the national legend while making it serve as a trumpet call to the blind and the timid of his fellow-countrymen.

In *There Shall Be No Night* Sherwood took for his subject a contemporary exhibition of heroism—the gallant resistance of the Finns to the Russian invasion. He wrote the drama in January and February, 1940, under constant pressure of the knowledge that events might at any moment render his work out of date. As a matter of fact the war on Finland was over before the play opened. But the Finns' courageous fight for their freedom against the forces of despotism remained a striking example for others to follow. Indeed, the drama was written to rescue America from the abject fear which made her unwilling to take up arms against a menace as great to her own way of life as to the free countries of Continental Europe, which were being rapidly overrun by the Nazis even while the drama was enjoying its first great success.

Sherwood in this work, as in *Abe Lincoln*, makes his effects so simply and easily that some of the critics complained that the issues were never brought into direct conflict in gripping scenes. He is content to show what the war does to a highly civilized Finnish family. Its head is a Dr. Valkonen, a scientist who has just won the Nobel prize. A man with an abiding faith in human decency and prog-

ress, he abhors above everything the stupid destruction which war brings. Yet, when his only son is killed, he gives up his research and plunges into the struggle to serve as a surgeon at the front. In spite of defeat and disaster he does not even then yield to despair. For he insists that the war is not the death rattle of civilization but "the deferred death rattle of the primordial beast" resident in every man. So he and all men of good will must fight, not for national glory, but for the preservation of what human freedom and human dignity man has laboriously gained through the ages. Thus he may help "speed the day when man becomes genuinely human, instead of the synthetic creature—part bogus angel, part actual brute—that he has imagined himself in the past." With such optimistic utterances Sherwood tells us that he emphatically agrees.

In this tragedy it is clear that Sherwood has traveled far from the cynicism in which his career began, from a pessimism expressed in compensatory satirical gaiety married to brilliant technical skill. In *There Shall Be No Night* he speaks at last in the accents of the great dramatists of every age, employing the lavish resources of his art to voice, in the compelling idiom of the stage, his own deepest convictions. And it is these plays which have awakened the hero that dwells in every common man in America and have made him eager to take his part in the supreme struggle for the preservation of Christian civilization.

## DR. HOLMES AND THE FAITH IN THE FUTURE

NEAL FRANK DOUBLEDAY<sup>1</sup>

Probably not many people now read Oliver Wendell Holmes; indeed, a just appreciation of that urbane and intelligent gentleman requires some effort of the historical imagination. But Dr. Holmes may have his turn again—the critical judgments of the 1920's are not lasting well. Meanwhile, Holmes remains an interesting, and in some respects a significant, figure in our intellectual history.<sup>2</sup> He records for us the impact of Unitarianism on a highly articulate New Englander of considerable scientific attainment. His thought foreshadows the direction of liberal Protestantism, particularly in those ideas and attitudes which carry over into secular thinking. And he represents for us, in a striking manner, that faith in the Idea of Progress which has been, for good or ill, in the background of so much American thinking. If Holmes is not a very profound thinker, he is, for that reason, the more representative.

Dr. Holmes was preoccupied with religious matters. John T. Morse, his nephew and biographer, says:

Dr. Holmes loved medicine, and found deep pleasure in literature, but more than by either medicine or literature he was attracted by theology. His thought, his talk, his writing, in whatever direction it might set out, was sure soon to oscillate towards this polar topic. It was this that lent the dignity of a persistent and serious purpose to his work.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Instructor in English at the University of Connecticut.

<sup>2</sup> See Harry Hayden Clark's incisive, scholarly study of the body of Holmes's thought, "Dr. Holmes: A Re-interpretation," *New England Quarterly*, XII (March, 1939), 19-34.

<sup>3</sup> J. T. Morse, Jr., *Life and Letters of O. W. Holmes* (Boston, 1896), I, 268.

Yet Morse, thinking that "the lessons to which he gave so much space have all been learned," gives relatively little attention to Holmes's religious thought. We can hardly afford, however, to neglect the central matter of Holmes's work; or, as writers on Holmes have been prone to do, to dismiss it with approval as liberal and therefore admirable, paying little attention to its implications. Nor should we think of what Holmes has to say on religion as only attack on what he called "puritanism" or "orthodoxy" or "Calvinism,"<sup>4</sup> for Holmes was also much concerned to advance his own faith.

That large part of Holmes's writing which is attack on Calvinism would be, perhaps, best discussed by a psychologist. Barrett Wendell remarks:

In the persistency with which this spectre of Calvinism rose before him there was something which he may well have fancied to be like the diabolic possessions so fervently believed in by the Puritan fathers. He might lay the spectre again and again, but every time he took up his pen it would arise inhuman as ever.<sup>5</sup>

And Holmes himself seems to have in mind the persistency of Calvinism in his imagination when he says that "you cannot educate a man wholly out of the superstitious fears which were early implanted in his imagination; no matter how utterly his reason may reject them."<sup>6</sup> There was in Holmes a conflict

<sup>4</sup> Holmes does not use these terms with great precision. In this paper "orthodoxy" and "Calvinism" are to be taken in the general meaning Holmes gives them: conservative New England Protestantism as opposed to Unitarianism.

<sup>5</sup> *A Literary History of America* (New York, 1901), pp. 422-23.

<sup>6</sup> *The Works of O. W. Holmes* ("Standard Library

between the influence of his Calvinistic heritage and the liberal atmosphere of Cambridge—a conflict which lasted all his life. Late in his career he feels a peculiar necessity to justify the departure of sons from the faith of their fathers, returning to defend himself from a charge made thirty years before.<sup>7</sup> And it must occur to every reader that in much of what Holmes writes on Calvinism he is convincing and justifying himself.

Some aspects of Dr. Holmes's persistent attack on Calvinism puzzle the reader today. It seems curious now that so intelligent a man as Holmes thought so exclusively in terms of the conflict between Unitarianism and Calvinism; that, in his view of Christendom, he never escaped the limits of his time or of his place. Then, too, Holmes was guided, emotionally at least, by the conviction that the doctrine of predestination was inhuman and repellent; yet, as a scientist, Holmes spoke as a determinist<sup>8</sup> and wrote in his "medicated novels" studies in a sort of physiological determinism.<sup>9</sup> Finally, it may seem from the perspective of the reader today that Holmes was valiantly fighting a foe which had been in retreat some time before he entered

Edition"), III, 328. The "Standard Library Edition" is hereinafter cited simply by volume number and page number.

<sup>7</sup> IV, 246-51, and see VIII, 422.

<sup>8</sup> See "Mechanism in Thought and Morals" and "Crime and Automatism," Vol. VIII.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes does once remark: "We are getting to be predestinarians as much as Edwards or Calvin was, only instead of universal corruption of nature derived from Adam, we recognize inherited congenital tendencies,—some good, some bad,—for which the subject of them is in no sense responsible" (VIII, 380). But the thought that the doctrine of the fall of man may be an allegory that gets a certain support in experience seems not to occur to him. See a thoughtful discussion of the problem in S. I. Hayakawa and H. M. Jones, *Oliver Wendell Holmes* (New York, 1939), pp. xliv-lviii.

the fray. Of course, the perspective of the reader today is bound to be oversimplified, and there is evidence that to readers of Holmes's own day his attack on Calvinism seemed vital and immediate.

Nevertheless, if Dr. Holmes's attack on Calvinism were only attack, we should be justified in dismissing it as belated polemics, of minor interest even to the historian. Its interest for us is the positive ideas it includes. Two distinguished historians of American literature, Barrett Wendell and V. L. Parrington, have put special stress on Holmes's rationalism. Perhaps he is a rationalist—certainly the judgment would have been acceptable to Holmes. But there is in Holmes's rationalism a large admixture of attitudes more emotional than intellectual, of ideas more matters of faith than of reason. Holmes had, moreover, a propensity to make the assumptions current among liberal thinkers of his time and place, and his writing on religious matters is not nearly so critical as he evidently believed it to be; it is, indeed, often the extravagant expression of ideas and attitudes long familiar to New England in the sermons of William Ellery Channing, for Holmes is closer to Channing than he is to the Unitarian leaders of his own generation.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Holmes's religious thinking has three main tenets, each in some way characteristic of American religious attitudes—tenets which may be provisionally called the Idea of Progress, Religious Nationalism, and a new Revelation of a Deity of sympathy and love.

#### THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

In a famous analogy in *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* Dr. Holmes tells

<sup>10</sup> II, 16; V. L. Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America* (New York, 1927), p. 456.

how, when a stone is overturned, the repulsive life under it is thrown into confusion by the sunshine; but next year the space that had been occupied by the stone is clothed in beauty. Just so when ancient error is overturned by truth. There is at first "a terrible squirming and scattering of the horrid little population that dwells under it," but soon the light has its effect, and

then shall the nature which had lain blanched and broken rise in its full stature and native hues in the sunshine. Then shall God's minstrels build their nests in the hearts of a newborn humanity. Then shall beauty—Divinity taking outlines and color—light upon the souls of men as the butterfly, image of the beatified spirit rising from the dust, soars from the shell that held a poor grub, which would never have found wings had not the stone been lifted.<sup>11</sup>

Holmes's confidence in the free mind makes him representative of our national tradition. Here speaks the finest spirit of eighteenth-century rationalism as it persisted in nineteenth-century Unitarianism. This faith in the free mind and the faith in the future which accompanied it are at the center of Holmes's thinking.

Holmes's faith in the free mind and his faith in the future guide his thinking far more than does science. In some autobiographical notes written late in life, Dr. Holmes says: "The truest revelation, it seems to me, which man has received is that influx of knowledge brought about by astronomy, geology, and the comparative study of creeds, which have made it a necessity to remodel the religious belief of the last few thousand years."<sup>12</sup> As far as "the comparative study of creeds" is concerned, the wonder is that Holmes had so little knowledge of it. It is usual to suppose that science influenced Holmes's re-

ligious convictions, and it is, of course, true that he frequently speaks of science in connection with religion, much in the manner he does in the sentence quoted. But it would be difficult to show that Holmes's scientific knowledge ever gave him any specifically religious conviction or changed any conviction. He revolted early from orthodoxy, and he explains his revolt as partly instinctive, partly the result of liberal influences around him.<sup>13</sup> When he speaks of science in connection with religion, he ordinarily uses science to buttress a familiar Unitarian doctrine or attitude, which, to be sure, may have been influenced by science at some time in its history, but which came to Holmes as part of the climate of opinion about him. How little science is responsible for the main tenets of Holmes's faith is particularly apparent in the way in which he uses the Darwinian doctrine of evolution as confirmation of the Idea of Progress.

Dr. Holmes and his fellow-Unitarians shared Channing's belief that man is potentially good and possesses "an immortal germ, which may be said to contain now within itself what endless ages are to unfold."<sup>14</sup> Holmes asks: "Do we not all *hope*, at least, that the doctrine of man's being a blighted abortion, a miserable disappointment to his Creator, and hostile and hateful to him from his birth, may give way to the belief that he is the latest terrestrial manifestation of an ever upward-striving movement of divine power?" The passage is highly characteristic of Holmes's religious thinking: if we do not hold the doctrine of natural depravity, then, of course, we will hold the Idea of Progress, and that is the great good in clearing away orthodoxy. The

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-47.

<sup>12</sup> Morse, *op. cit.*, I, 43.

<sup>14</sup> *The Works of W. E. Channing* (Boston, 1865), I, vi.

doctrine of evolution as Holmes understood it supported the Idea of Progress. What, he asks, is "the secret of the profound interest which 'Darwinism' has excited?" And he answers: "It is because it restores 'Nature' to its place as a true divine manifestation. . . . If development upward is the general law of the race; if we have grown by natural evolution out of the cave-man, and even less human forms of life, we have everything to hope from the future."<sup>15</sup> The doctrine of evolution, Holmes says in another place, "so far as it is accepted, changes the whole relations of man to the creative power."<sup>16</sup> According to Channing, "the faith which is most wanted, is a faith in what we and our fellow-beings may become, a faith in the divine germ or principle in every soul."<sup>17</sup> And Holmes's faith is primarily that: a faith in what man may become. All his religious thinking has its focus in the future of man on this earth.

Because the Idea of Progress is so large a part of Dr. Holmes's thinking, he comes sometimes to amazing oversimplification. "The real, vital division of the religious part of our Protestant communities," he can write, "is into Christian optimists and Christian pessimists." Holmes's description of the "Christian pessimist" sums up the popular notion of the sour-faced Puritan.

The Christian optimist in his fullest development is characterized by a cheerful countenance, a voice in the major key, an undisguised enjoyment of earthly comforts, and a short confession of faith. His theory of the universe is progress; his idea of God is that he is a Father with all true paternal attributes, of man that he is destined to come into harmony with the key-note of divine order, of this earth that it is a training school for a better sphere of existence.

<sup>15</sup> III, 269, 305.

<sup>16</sup> IV, 255.

<sup>17</sup> *Works*, III, 314.

Holmes's two types of religious persons may remind us of William James's distinction between the two types of religious natures: "the healthy-minded" and "the sick soul." But, unlike James, Holmes does not see both his religious types as permanent in human nature: The natural antagonists of the religious pessimists are the men of science, especially the evolutionists, and the poets. . . . It is not science alone that the old Christian pessimism has got to struggle with, but the instincts of childhood, the affections of maternity, the intuitions of poets, the contagious humanity of the philanthropist,—in short, human nature and the advance of civilization.<sup>18</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

Although Dr. Holmes put a high value on tradition in social and literary matters, as a religious thinker he expressed the constant tendency of Protestantism—a tendency which seems never quite to fulfil itself—to cut away not only the tradition from which it had originally broken but its own tradition as well. Since, as "a *bonnet-rouge*" in things of the intellect, he believed that "every age has to shape the Divine image it worships over again," that "political freedom inevitably generates a new type of religious character," and that "democratic America has a different humanity from feudal Europe"—since he believed these things, he believed that America "must have a new divinity," or, as he elsewhere expresses the idea, Christianity must be "Americanized."<sup>19</sup> An analogous sort of thinking is familiar enough to us in the long discussion of a national literature for the United States, and perhaps Holmes's religious nationalism was the result of the same impulse as literary nationalism,<sup>20</sup> although Holmes, despite

<sup>18</sup> VIII, 430–33.

<sup>19</sup> II, 15; IV, 40; VIII, 310; II, 122, 207.

<sup>20</sup> In the thought of William Ellery Channing literary and religious nationalism are closely con-

his provincialism, was not a literary nationalist in theory.<sup>21</sup>

Probably Dr. Holmes would have been unwilling to have his doctrine of a new and American religion carried to its logical conclusion. He continues to speak in terms of Christianity, and he seems to envisage some sort of continuing tradition when he says, speaking of the Bible, that "every generation dissolves something new and precipitates something once held in solution from that great storehouse of temporary and permanent truths."<sup>22</sup> Yet much that Holmes says leaves the way open for a complete break with tradition and implies a contempt for it. His religious nationalism is most strikingly expressed by the Little Boston of *The Professor at the Breakfast Table*, a character Holmes contrived for the extravagant expression of his own opinions.

"Our religion," Little Boston says, "has been Judaized, it has been Romanized, it has been Orientalized, it has been Anglicized, and the time is at hand when it must be AMERICANIZED!" "It won't be long, Sir," he continues, "before we have Americanized religion as we have Americanized government." Yet Little Boston's Americanized religion, if we can trust the metaphor Holmes puts in his mouth, will be Christianity newly fitted out. There is an ark, Little Boston says, "built about two thousand years ago" and never launched. But, in America—indeed, in Boston—the "old rotten cargo" will be removed and the old ark floated.

It's a slow business, this of getting the ark launched. The Jordan wasn't deep enough, and nected, for he hopes for a distinctive national literature by "a new action or development of the religious principle" (*Works*, I, 273-76).

<sup>21</sup> See Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>22</sup> II, 122.

the Tiber wasn't deep enough, and the Rhone wasn't deep enough, and the Thames wasn't deep enough,—and perhaps the Charles isn't deep enough; but I don't feel sure of that, Sir, and I love to hear the workmen knocking at the old blocks of tradition and making the ways smooth with the oil of the Good Samaritan. I don't know, Sir,—but I do think she stirs a little,—I do believe she slides;—and when I think of what a work that is for the dear old three-breasted mother of American liberty, I would not take all the glory of all the greatest cities in the world for my birthright on the soil of little Boston!<sup>23</sup>

"Some of us," the Professor remarks, "could not help smiling at this burst of local patriotism," but Little Boston's words only exaggerate Dr. Holmes's own religious provincialism. Holmes expresses the same ideas as extravagantly, if more pretentiously, in "Wind-Clouds and Star-Drifts," the young astronomer's poem in *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*. Although Holmes does not accept full responsibility for some of the young astronomer's "more daring thoughts," "Wind-Clouds and Star-Drifts" is entirely consistent with Holmes's religious thought as expressed throughout his work and must be taken as his most serious formulation of his beliefs and religious hopes, his one sustained and exalted treatment of his faith. "Ye are the chosen people," the young astronomer says to his generation of Americans:

Your prophets are a hundred unto one  
Of them of old who cried, "Thus saith the  
Lord"; . . .

The tree of knowledge in your garden grows  
Not single, but at every humble door; . . .

Ye that have tasted that divinest fruit,  
Look on this world of yours with opened eyes!  
Ye are as gods! Nay, makers of your gods,—  
Each day ye break an image in your shrine  
And plant a fairer image where it stood.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> II, 207-8, 218-19.

<sup>24</sup> III, 233.

## A NEW REVELATION OF DEITY

Although Dr. Holmes's creed "is to be found in the first two words of the Pater Noster," "every age has to shape the Divine image it worships over again."<sup>25</sup> The Divine image Holmes would shape is known to him primarily through the influence of maternal woman. "There are," he says, "at least three real saints among women to one among men"; "the real religion of the world comes from women much more than from men—from mothers most of all"; "in all common aspects they are so much above us that we get most of our religion from them,—from their teachings, from their example,—above all, from their pure affections"; women have "much more of hearty faith, much more of spiritual life" than men.<sup>26</sup>

The human soul, Holmes makes one of his characters say, "will find its God in the unseen,—Father, Saviour, Divine Spirit, Virgin Mother,—it must and will breathe its longings and its griefs into the heart of a Being capable of understanding all its necessities and sympathizing with all its woes."<sup>27</sup> Of this Being we learn most from women. "God has not left the hard intellect of man to work out its devices without the constant presence of beings with gentler and purer instincts"; the influence of women continually "sweetens, or at least, dilutes an acrid doctrine."<sup>28</sup> And woman's function is not only that of modifying dogma. "I have been ready to believe," Dr. Holmes writes, "that we even now have a new revelation, and the name of its Messiah is WOMAN!"<sup>29</sup> Holmes is reported to have said in con-

versation that "we select adjectives, the most beautiful and sublime in our language, and with these we make our God."<sup>30</sup> All Holmes's adjectives for the Divine describe the ideal of the maternal, and the religion he would inculcate has a tender, sympathetic, feminine Deity. "Would that the heart of woman warmed our creeds!" he exclaims in the last portion of "Wind-Clouds and Star-Drifts." Men and their angry theology have failed—

Ah, not from these the listening soul can hear  
The Father's voice that speaks itself divine!  
Love must be still our Master; till we learn  
What he can teach us of a woman's heart,  
We know not His, whose love embraces all.<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Holmes's frequent recurrence to the idea that the Deity is revealed in woman is partly accounted for by the pervasive influence of his mother upon his religious development.<sup>32</sup> And, in a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Holmes refers to Theodore Parker's insistence upon "the *maternal* element in the Divine Being."<sup>33</sup> But no single influence accounts for Holmes's continual return to the necessity of a feminine revelation, and the idea represents a need in his religious nature that the religion of his Boston, orthodox or Unitarian, did not fulfil. One is reminded of Henry Adams' wistful attraction to the thirteenth-century worship of the Virgin, and Holmes himself is perhaps not quite unaware of the likeness of his longing to a religion far older than the orthodoxy he attacked.

There are women's faces, some real, some ideal, which contain something in them that becomes a positive element in our creed, so di-

<sup>25</sup> Morse, *op. cit.*, II, 245; IV, 40. See also I, 89.

<sup>26</sup> II, 121, 124, 209; III, 186.

<sup>27</sup> III, 194.

<sup>28</sup> VIII, 91, 422.

<sup>29</sup> II, 125.

<sup>30</sup> Morse, *op. cit.*, I, 274.

<sup>31</sup> III, 312.

<sup>32</sup> See Holmes's autobiographical note on his religious education in Morse, *op. cit.*, I, 37-43, and compare a passage in *Over the Teacups*, IV, 246-51.

<sup>33</sup> Morse, *op. cit.*, II, 231.

rect and palpable a revelation is it of the infinite purity and love. I remember two faces of women with wings, such as they call angels, of Fra Angelico,—and I just now came across a print of Raphael's Santa Apollina, with something of the same quality,—which I am sure had their prototypes in the world above ours. No wonder the Catholics pay their vows to the Queen of Heaven! The unpoetical side of Protestantism is, that it has no women to be worshipped.<sup>34</sup>

However, although Holmes might feel Protestantism unpoetical, and although the little he knew of Catholicism had some attraction for him,<sup>35</sup> he believed that "the active mind of the century is tending more and more to the two poles, Rome and Reason,"<sup>36</sup> and considered himself a champion of Reason. Yet, much as Holmes may have been a rationalist in his attacks on orthodoxy, his positive faith is a matter not of Reason but of the heart. "The Broad Church"—the faith to which Holmes looks forward, the faith to be realized in the future—will never "be founded on any fusion of *intellectual beliefs*"; it will have "its creed in the heart, and not in the head."<sup>37</sup>

Now Channing had said, and in substance said over and over again, that "God is another name for human intelligence raised above all error and imperfection, and extended to all possible truth."<sup>38</sup> In Holmes's insistence on an emotional and feminine religion, a religion primarily of the heart, which "will never be based on anything that requires the use of *language*," he is reacting to the intellectualism of Unitarianism fully as much as he is to the intellectualism of orthodoxy. There was in Unitarianism—and more markedly in transcendentalism—a constant tendency to depersonalize

the Deity and to identify him with the reason, moral law, or some other abstraction. And in reaction to the habit of abstraction in the religion about him, Holmes insists that religion ought to be the product of the feminine, the concrete, the instinctive, and emotional temper. His religion, fully realized, would be very different from the serenely abstract Unitarianism of Channing. But Holmes speaks of this faith as in the process of becoming, of a new revelation not completely given. Here, too, he looks to the future.

Dr. Holmes's religious thought is remarkably characteristic of the American mind: as a religious thinker he is consciously nationalistic, he disregards tradition, and he even makes the assumption of the superior spirituality of women which American men have been so willing to make that religion has been with us for some time primarily a woman's activity. Above all, he has what has been specially characteristic of the American mind—a firm confidence in a beneficent future combined with a pervasive suspicion and dislike of the past. The Idea of Progress informs his faith; his Americanized religion and his new revelation of the divine image are in the process of becoming. In his thought we can see something of the way in which the Idea of Progress, superimposed on Christianity, made, for many Americans, faith a kind of prophecy, and prophecy a habit which carried over to secular thinking. Yet, in Dr. Holmes, the Idea of Progress was never the ugly materialism it can become, and the progress in which he trusted was primarily of the mind and spirit.

No American ought to be insensitive to Holmes's homage to the free mind, and even his confidence in the future we

<sup>34</sup> II, 178.

<sup>35</sup> See IV, 250–51; Morse, *op. cit.*, II, 253.

<sup>36</sup> II, 123.

<sup>37</sup> II, 298.

<sup>38</sup> *Works*, III, 233–34.

must recognize as part of our tradition, and as much a secular part as a religious part. But, if we are willing, now that we have begun to cherish our tradition, to appraise it as well, we must see that the disillusion that came after the War between the States—of which even Holmes was aware<sup>39</sup> and which has since his time been ever present—goes back to the faith in the future that eighteenth-century rationalism fathered and actuality has disappointed. The belief that humanity inevitably progresses, guided

"In a letter of 1872 to his friend Motley, Holmes expresses fears for the future that have no parallel, so far as I know, in his work. He writes: 'I am curious about the future course of things. It looks to me as if my old formula of Rome or Reason was fast working itself out, and I think Rome and its offshoots are to be one of the main dependences of the coming generation. The anchor of the church is fastened in the mud of legend and superstition, but it will hold a good while yet, and our children or grandchildren are going to need it, or they will see some grand overturn, and Caleb Cushing's 'Man on horseback' sitting on the heap of bloody ashes to bring order back again' (Morse, *op. cit.*, I, 254-55). I think this may be interpreted only as the expression of a passing mood; if it had really represented a sincere conviction, certainly *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*, published just before Holmes wrote this letter, would have been very a different book. Nevertheless, the fact that this sort of prophecy was possible to Holmes makes the supreme confidence of some passages in his work seem irresponsible.

or rather pushed, by "an ever upward-striving movement of divine power" may have been an enviable one; but, in circumstances in which it is untenable, our heritage of the irresponsible optimism which accompanied it is frail armor against actuality. Holmes succeeded in nearly ignoring the momentous changes in his Boston during the last half of his life. Our problem has become that of keeping our faith in the free mind without the aid of the illusions that supported the faith in the free mind for Holmes and for his intellectual forebears.

Dr. Holmes never fully realized the implications of his belief that "development upward is the general law of the race"—certainly he never saw that his brand of predestination may be morally dangerous, may imply a denial not only of the importance of the will but of the importance of individual integrity. Such phrases as "everything to hope from the future" or "human nature and the advance of civilization" ring ironic to us now. But there is gain in the loss of illusion, and, if we lose the Idea of Progress, we may gain a juster notion of individual responsibility and even some humility.

## THE TWO MAIN STREETS OF SINCLAIR LEWIS

LEO<sup>1</sup> AND MIRIAM GURKO

In 1930 Sinclair Lewis became the first American writer to win the Nobel Prize. Yet, during the last twelve years, he has published only one novel, *Ann Vickers*, which by the remotest stretch of the imagination can be regarded as within the periphery of his great work; his last four books have been successively pain-

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ful failures, representing in an ever downward arc the decay of a once flourishing and prolific talent.

An examination of his work, and more particularly the three principal divisions into which it falls, suggests that to the degree that Lewis practices the art of satire—and particularly satire against the Main Street which he made famous—

to that degree his novels teem with an abundant life; conversely, his abandonment of satire drains his works of their élan and reduces them to pulpiness and routine. There are to be observed in him two distinct, fundamentally antithetical points of view with regard to his central theme. On the one hand, he satirizes the materialists of Zenith and Gopher Prairie for their ignorance, their standardized thinking, aggressive provincialism, and self-righteous tyranny over all those who do not rigidly subscribe to their ways. On the other, he finds in them much kindness, honesty, a genuine idealism which on occasion assumes the guise of social reform, and even a certain poetic sensitivity. This antithesis, this alternation between attack and defense, permeates nearly all his novels and is to be found even in the great satirical classics of the 1920's.

Before the advent of these classics, however, Lewis wrote a number of little-known, small-scale novels, in which the roots of this antithesis are perhaps most clearly visible. He veers from whimsical apologetics for the provincial, "folksy" people, later to be ridiculed in *Main Street*, to heated criticisms of them, their institutions, and their ways of life. If *Our Mr. Wrenn*, *The Innocents*, and *Free Air* represent the first attitude, then *The Trail of The Hawk* and *The Job* express the second. *The Job*—the most serious and perhaps the best of these early novels—straddles both sides. It begins with an exposure of what Lewis considers the uselessness and irrational mechanism of business life but concludes with roseate observations of this very life. The book—indeed, this whole early period—reveals the uncertainties within Lewis' mind. He has not succeeded, as, in a sense, he was destined never to succeed, wholly to resolve his central theme:

whether to satirize or espouse Main Street. We have here a portrait of a novelist still grappling with his theme, testing it from various angles, giving free rein to his ambivalent feelings. This period of unfocused hesitation and doubt comes to an abrupt end with the spectacular appearance of *Main Street*, which opens the second large phase of Lewis' career—the phase of the great satires and the triumphant journey to the Nobel Prize.

*Main Street* lays the groundwork of Lewis' campaign against a crassly materialist society wherever it appears, in small towns like Gopher Prairie, as well as in sizable industrial communities like Zenith and metropolises like New York. As long as he maintains his satirical offensive, as long as Carol Kennicott rebels against the demoralizing philistinism of Gopher Prairie, the novel has enormous power. The point of the book is definitively clear, and the exposure of the soullessness of provincial life is deadly and all embracing. But Lewis is not content to let matters rest here. He blurs his focus by occasional confusing shifts in sympathy. At times he appears to side with Will Kennicott, who embodies and defends the solid qualities of Main Street; at such times it is Carol who appears ridiculous. More than once she and her cultured friends are accused of snobbishly pursuing a false and contentless spirituality. But perhaps the most formidable shift is Carol's inexplicable acceptance of Main Street at the end of the novel. She returns to Gopher Prairie, not resolved to make the best of a bad bargain, but suddenly and mystically enthusiastic:

The prairie was no longer empty land in the sun-glare; it was the living tawny beast which she had fought and made beautiful by fighting;

and in the village streets were shadows of her desire and the sound of her marching and the seeds of mystery and greatness.

To describe Gopher Prairie as beautiful and filled with mystery and greatness is to negate everything that was said before. These shifts reveal Lewis' uncertainty, his alternate acceptance and rejection of Main Street. Though the first of his great satirical novels of the post-war period, *Main Street* contains, in an almost Hegelian fashion, the seeds of its own antithesis.

Lewis' affection for Will Kennicott introduces a whole series of curiously sympathetic portraits, which expose still further the duality of his feelings. The bellicose materialism of George F. Babbitt and the Rev. Elmer Gantry seems no more abhorrent to Lewis than does Kennicott's. For all their faults, Babbitt and Gantry are presented as pretty decent fellows at bottom. Gantry is a cheat, rogue, bluff, coward; but he is also good company, and Lewis obviously revels in his gusto. As for Babbitt, though Lewis pillories his ideas and associates, he displays a warm affection for the man himself. Babbitt longs to revolt, has faint aesthetic stirrings, and labors under the weight of enough courage to take a few hesitant steps away from the fence by which he is generally bounded. Not an effectual person, certainly, but a very human and likable one. Even the pathetic Lowell Schmaltz, protagonist of *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*, awakens more pity than censure. Lewis may not have much use for the ideals of Main Street, but he has a very considerable use for a very considerable number of Main Streeters.

The one towering exception to this duality, the one novel in which Lewis shakes himself free from the contradictions enmeshing him, is *Arrowsmith*. The satirical issues are at their clearest: his

hostility to materialism is undiluted by affection for any of its representatives. Here, for the first time, Lewis is ranged entirely on the side of the rebels, who in the persons of Martin Arrowsmith, Terry Wickett, and Professor Gottlieb variously epitomize the spirit of Carol Kennicott. The struggle between the individual seeking to live honestly and the world of the Babbitts driving him to live his life and practice his profession as it wills is joined most sharply. At medical school Arrowsmith collides with the bedside-manner charlatanism of the professors interested only in success. As a practitioner in the small town of Wheatsylvania, he is hamstrung by the crude superstitions of the residents of this Gopher Prairie. As a health officer in the larger city of Nautilus, he works under Dr. Amos Pickerbaugh, who is more interested in using medicine as a springboard for political advancement than as a means of implementing the Hippocratic Oath. As a research worker in a fashionable Chicago clinic, he encounters the suave worldliness of Angus Duer, the archetype of the society doctor. Finally, in the great McGurk Institute in New York he combats the disease of Administrative Success, which takes the form of publishing brilliant, half-finished experiments for their publicity value, with no concern for the true advancement of science.

The Angus Duers, Dr. Pickerbaughs, the crass instructors at medical school, the denizens of Wheatsylvania, the administrators of the McGurk Institute, are clearly enough the apostles of Main Street and Zenith. They represent the same standards of egotistical and aggressive materialism, but these standards are studied and satirized by Lewis without compromise, without the smallest trace of personal liking or sympathy for their exponents.

If *Arrowsmith* marks the apex of the synthesis of Lewis' satirical convictions, *Dodsworth* as clearly foreshadows the dissolution of that synthesis and therefore marks the beginning of the third period of his work. For the first time Lewis draws a completely friendly portrait of a successful businessman; for the first time the rebel is projected unsympathetically. Lewis' focus has shifted from a broad attack upon Main Street to a broad defense of it. Underneath the probing into the lives of the Dodsworths, Lewis' change of heart becomes increasingly apparent. In this change Fran is the key figure. Here is a kind of Carol Kennicott in her forties, chafing under the dulness of life in Zenith, passing a great many devastating observations upon her husband's Main Street friends and upon the empty materialism of Zenith society. These are, of course, Lewis' own observations, which he has been developing in earlier books; but Fran is not the heroine of her story, as Carol is of hers and *Arrowsmith* of his. Quite the reverse. She emerges as a disagreeable snob, vainly seeking to recapture her lost youth, utterly blind to the virtues of her faithful husband. The rebel here is more than a lost soul; she is an empty soul as well; and this emptiness signals what is to be Lewis' principal opinion of the rebel through much of his work in the 1930's.

In the struggle between Fran and Dodsworth, it is Dodsworth who comes out best. Like Babbitt, he is solid, dependable, dull, moved by a vague humanitarian desire to improve things, out of his depth in nearly all affairs outside the realm of business. But, whereas Lewis lampoons these qualities in Babbitt, he praises them in Dodsworth. In Dodsworth's triumph there lies foreshadowed, with an immutable finality, the new role of Lewis, no longer the satirist but the apostle of Main Street.

Before settling into his new role, Lewis takes one last fling at his old ideas in *Ann Vickers*. But, while it is true that this novel survives within Lewis' great tradition and that Ann, like Carol, fights for a better world, the satirical method has been significantly altered. In the earlier books the satire always coalesces around specific individuals. In *Arrowsmith*, for example, as differentiated symbols of medicine gone materialistically mad, we have Angus Duer, Amos Pickerbaugh, and the commercialists of the McGurk Institute; and the book is a very great one in part because it is so intensely human and cleaves so unfailingly to personalities. No such coalescence is evident in *Ann Vickers*. The attacks on settlement houses and prison administration remain generalized, detached from significant individual characters. Lewis' ideas filter through as much in the form of reportage as fiction, and because of this the satire is blunter and softer.

After *Ann Vickers*, Lewis' art comes apart at the seams. He appears to lose all interest in satire, now that he devotes himself more or less completely to defending Main Street and upholding its ways of life. Paradoxically, he defends Main Street against his own attacks and now views the Carols and the Arrowsmiths of the 1930's through the eyes of Sam Clark, Vergil Gunch, and their Main Street cronies. By a circular and devious route, he returns to the "hominess" and the small civic virtues of his first published work, *Our Mr. Wrenn*.

The evidences of this *volte-face* abound in the novels of his third and most recent period. *Work of Art*, for example, glorifies that very Service which Lewis ridiculed in *Babbitt*. Lewis has changed his conception of materialist pursuits: they no longer constrict, but release, the creative energies of those engaged in them. Myron Weagle, the hotelkeeper in *Work*

of Art, and Fred Cornplow in *The Prodigal Parents* are more than successful and likable human beings: they are artists, poets, and idealistic dreamers as well. Conversely, the rebels and free souls come in for very rough treatment at Lewis' hands. They now fall into three categories: the dissipated bohemians like Ora Weagle, the Fascists of *It Can't Happen Here*, and the Communists of *The Prodigal Parents*. What a sad end to the struggles of Carol Kennicott and Martin Arrowsmith! And, to complete the transformation, Zenith and Gopher Prairie have been metamorphosed into the simple, charming towns of Lemuel, Kansas, and Fort Beulah, Vermont.

Lewis' critics have, on the whole, insufficiently noted the organic development of his ideas. V. F. Calverton, for example, bases his essays on Lewis largely on the thesis that Lewis really identified and associated himself with Main Street throughout his career, and he gravely underrates the hostility which frequently accompanied that process of identification. Professor Whipple dogmatizes in the opposite direction, stating that Lewis is profoundly antipathetic to Main Street and that this antipathy derives from Lewis' own "malignant hatred" of his environment. Stuart P. Sherman, in a brochure on Lewis written after the appearance of *Babbitt*, draws an instructive comparison between Carol Kennicott and Madame Bovary but fails to note the intellectual antagonisms present in *Main Street*. Mr. Robert Cantwell, who, together with Professor Whipple, has written perhaps the most generally useful criticism of Lewis, dismisses all the early novels as hackwork and consequently fails to note the sources of the later shifts in focus.

An inclusive examination of Lewis' novels from 1914 to 1940 makes a one-

track view of his work impossible. It cannot be said that he hates or loves Main Street. He does both—and both simultaneously. This simultaneous coexistence of contradictory feelings is a source of much of the intellectual wavering present even in many of his great novels and is perhaps a major reason for his decline as a chronicler of the American scene. The hesitations and reversals of his first period, the satirical crystallization of the second, the apologetics of the third, are closely interwoven. During the 1920's the influence of H. L. Mencken upon Lewis (*Elmer Gantry* was dedicated to Mencken), added to the general disillusionment that set in after the First World War, had a catapulting influence upon his art and swept him out of both the coy whimsy of *Our Mr. Wrenn* and *The Innocents* and the intellectual floundering of *The Job*. These influences began waning with *Dodsworth* and were completely dead in *Work of Art*. Lewis was at his best as a satirist in a challenging frame of mind and as a writer who helped siphon the satirical tradition of Flaubert, Butler, and Galsworthy into the contemporary American novel and helped clear its air of the prettifications of the William Dean Howells school. As a satirist he was able to exploit his considerable talent for mimicry and caricature. When he abandoned satire, vitality drained away from his work, to which the succession of undistinguished novels of the 1930's bears witness.

This abandonment of satire, with its attendant perception of the remediable limitations of human life, has dimmed both his reputation and his talents in the last decade and has prevented him from keeping pace with Wolfe, Farrell, and Steinbeck—the major novelists of the American thirties.

## THE SELFISH HEROINE: THACKERAY AND GALSWORTHY

EDWARD WAGENKNECHT<sup>1</sup>

A book-length study might easily be made of the selfish heroine in English fiction. Such a study would begin at least as far back as Chaucer's *Criseyde*; and, if the term "English" were stretched to include fiction written on this side of the Atlantic, it might easily end with Scarlett O'Hara, a selfish heroine to end all selfish heroines, in the characteristically thoroughgoing American fashion! In the eighteenth century the model Pamela was by no means above prudential considerations. Among the Victorians, Dickens would have two or three of his later heroines to contribute (and possibly Dolly Varden among the earlier ones); Thackeray has Becky Sharp, Blanche Amory, and Beatrix Esmond; Trollope gives us more than one girl who weds for position rather than love—and lives to regret it. As for George Eliot, selfishness is the very informing theme of her fictions. Maggie Tulliver is easily the most winning of her egoists, and Gwendolen Harleth, who is saved at last "as by fire," is certainly, in her first phase, the most repellent. More recently there has been Lady Kitty in *The Marriage of William Ashe*, by Mr. Humphry Ward.

In this brief article I do not propose a comprehensive study. I wish, first, to comment on one Victorian heroine, Beatrix Esmond, and then upon one of the most interesting heroines of recent fiction, John Galsworthy's Fleur Forsyte.

### I

Beatrix has sometimes been called the most elaborately portrayed woman in

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English fiction. She is not analyzed in any such detail as Clarissa Harlowe, it is true, but we know Clarissa only for a very brief period in her life; Thackeray did not complete his characterization of Beatrix until he had reintroduced her as an old woman, the Baroness Bernstein, in *The Virginians*; the way in which the essential lines of the characterization are made to carry over from one book to another is a marvelous achievement.

Perhaps no other English heroine makes such a magnificent entrance as she, descending the staircase at Walcote House, "a wax candle in her hand, and illuminating her . . . the light falling indeed upon the scarlet ribbon which she wore, and upon the most brilliant white neck in the world."

She was a brown beauty: that is, her eyes, hair, and eyebrows and eyelashes were dark: her hair curling with rich undulations, and waving over her shoulders: but her complexion was as dazzling white as snow in sunshine; except her cheeks, which were a bright red, and her lips, which were of a still deeper crimson. Her mouth and chin, they said, were too large and full, and so they might be for a goddess in marble, but not for a woman whose eyes were fire, whose look was love, whose voice was the sweetest low song, whose shape was perfect symmetry, health, decision, activity, whose foot as it planted itself on the ground was firm and flexible, and whose motion, whether rapid or slow, was always perfect grace—agile as a nymph, lofty as a queen—now melting, now imperious, now sarcastic—there was no slight movement of hers but was beautiful. As he thinks of her, he who writes feels young again, and remembers a paragon.

But Beatrix is not destined to bring happiness to her lover—or to herself. Esmond knows her faults as well as we do. "She was imperious, she was light-

minded, she was flighty, she was false, she had no reverence in her character; she was in everything, even in beauty, the contrast of her mother, who was the most devoted and the least selfish of women." But it makes no difference. "From the very first moment he saw her on the stairs at Walcote, Esmond knew he loved Beatrix. There might be better women—he wanted that one."

No one, indeed, is unaware of the girl's shortcomings, least of all her mother. "The man who would marry her," she tells Esmond, "will not be happy with her, unless he be a great person, and can put her in a great position. . . . Were a duke to ask her, she would leave an earl whom she had promised. . . . I know not how my poor girl is so worldly."

What is more significant, Beatrix herself is innocent of illusions; beyond and above her extends a plane of being on which she knows she can never travel. She is an immensely subtler piece of characterization than Becky Sharp. In a sense, nobody could be more clear-sighted than Becky. But she is, as it were, all on one plane. She is satisfied with herself as she is. Never, even imaginatively, does she move out and away from herself to look back and achieve a dispassionate judgment. While Beatrix:

"Stay, Harry!" continued she, with a tone that had more despondency in it than she was accustomed to show. "Hear a last word. I do love you. I do admire you—who would not, that has known such love as yours has been for us all? But I think I have no heart; at least, I have never seen the man that could touch it; and, had I found him, I would have followed him in rags had he been a private soldier, or to sea, like one of those buccaneers you used to read us about when we were children. I would do anything for such a man, bear anything for him: but I never found one. You were ever too much of a slave to win my heart; even my Lord Duke could not command it. I had not been happy

had I married him. . . . I am not good, Harry; my mother is gentle and good like an angel. I wonder how she should have had such a child. She is weak, but she would die rather than do a wrong; I am stronger than she, but I would do it out of defiance. . . . Oh, I am sick and weary of the world! I wait but for one thing, and when 'tis done, I will take Frank's religion and your poor mother's, and go into a nunnery, and end like her. Shall I wear the diamonds then?—they say the nuns wear their best trinkets the day they take the veil. I will put them away as you bid me; farewell, cousin: mamma is packing the next room, racking her little head to know what we have been saying. She is jealous, all women are. I sometimes think that is the only womanly quality I have."

Comparing what Beatrix says of her mother with what her mother says of her, the reader may not feel that the advantage is wholly on Lady Castlewood's side. Though she is far less exasperating than Laura Bell of *Pendennis*, who would probably make more men happier by being boiled in oil than any other Victorian heroine, Lady Castlewood still has much of the characteristic unattractiveness of Thackeray's "good" women. There were many contradictions in that strangely vacillating genius, but none in his books is more striking than the difference between his worshipful comments on these characters and the spiteful way in which he often permits them to behave. The explanation, I think, is that he never quite got his head and his heart together, never quite reconciled the artist with the chivalrous male. When he talks about his female characters, he speaks as a Victorian gentleman should; but when it comes to describing their actions and reporting their speech his demon drives him and he tells the truth.

Certainly Lady Castlewood has not been a wise or an understanding mother to Beatrix, and certainly the girl's weaknesses have been accentuated by the circumstances of her life. She is engaged

first to Lord Ashburnham, but the engagement falls through; then she is engaged to the Duke of Hamilton. Just as she is preparing for her wedding, Hamilton and Lord Mohun fight a duel, and the same sword that had destroyed the girl's father takes the life of her affianced husband also. The climax comes when Esmond and his fellow-conspirators bring the Pretender to England during the last days of Queen Anne. Their plan to have him recognized as the heir to the throne at first seems in a fair way to succeed; but Beatrix cannot resist placing her own interests above what she and they alike think of as the welfare of England, and when the psychological moment arrives the prince is not to be found. This marks the break between Beatrix and her old life, and it cures Esmond at last of the long disease of his love for her.

And then in *The Virginians* we meet her again, as the aged Baroness Bernstein:

The Countess pressed all the good dishes upon her, of which she freely partook: the butler no sooner saw her glass empty than he filled it with champagne; the young folks and their mother kept up the conversation, not so much by talking, as by listening appropriately to their friends. She was full of spirits and humor. She seemed to know everybody in Europe, and about those everybodies the wickedest stories. The Countess of Castlewood, ordinarily a very demure, severe woman, and a stickler for the proprieties, smiled at the very worst of these anecdotes; the girls looked at one another and laughed at the maternal signal; the boys giggled and roared with especial delight at their sister's confusion. They also partook freely of the wine which the butler handed round, nor did they, or their guest, disdain the bowl of smoking punch, which was laid on the table after the supper. Many and many a night, the Baroness said, she had drunk at that table by her father's side.

Where else in English literature did a writer ever treat his heroine so cruelly as that? It is true that when Beatrix lies at last in delirium on her deathbed, we

learn, in broken French, that she has not been so bad as, ever since *Henry Esmond*, we have believed her to be. She fled with the Pretender not as his mistress but as his affianced bride, and he deceived her. Her life since that time has been far from blameless, however, and she has now achieved a graceless old age. Yet she is never a caricature, never a horror. We remember—and she remembers—what she has been.

Victorian didacticism may have its hold on Thackeray here. This, he may well be saying, is what the Beatrix Esmonds of the world become if their weaknesses are allowed to grow upon them unchecked. But this was surely a minor consideration, for in essential matters of characterization Thackeray's instinct was sure and his art incorruptible.

First-class tragedy has indeed little truck with the didactic spirit, and there is an element of first-class tragedy in Beatrix's history. Esmond came closer to touching her heart than any other man; had he been more masterful and less humble he might have won her. But it was not to be; the stars had willed it otherwise; the character which is fate had so ordered it. To meet such a woman, even in fiction, is to enlarge one's understanding of life.

## II<sup>2</sup>

"Fine Fleur Forsyte" enters to no such blowing of trumpets. She is a post-war girl: her skirts are short, her hair is shingled, and there is a cigarette in her mouth. Compared to Thackeray's manner with Beatrix, Galsworthy's way with Fleur seems almost casual. Beatrix is found in all the "set" pieces we expect of a romantic heroine in the Elizabethan

<sup>2</sup> Quotations in the ensuing discussion, from *The White Monkey*, *Swan Song*, and *One More River*, all by John Galsworthy, are made by kind permission of Charles Scribner's Sons, authorized publishers.

drama or in the opera; her farewell to Esmond is virtually an aria. There are no arias in Fleur's role; for she comes from a class notable for its underexpression, and it loses none of its reserve at Galsworthy's hands.

If Beatrix is correct in judging herself incapable of love, then here is another point of difference between her and Fleur. Fleur finds her love early, but unfortunately she finds him under circumstances which make it impossible for her to claim him. The child of Soames by his second wife, Annette—once more "Dombey and Son" was a daughter after all—she meets and loves Jon, the son of Soames's divorced wife, Irene, by her second husband, Soames's cousin, Young Jolyon.

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.

When the revelation comes, Fleur would go on, but the less hardy Jon draws back. Juliet does not kill herself with Romeo's dagger—the day of old heroic passions has gone by; instead, she marries Michael Mont, who is much too good for her. But one may bleed to death internally without using a dagger.

Neither Fleur's marriage with Michael nor her brief flirtation with Wilfrid Desert can convict her of inconstancy. She may be lacking in high-mindedness. If all the high-minded women are like Browning's Pompilia—

I felt there was just one thing Guido claimed  
I had no right to give nor he to take,  
We being in estrangement, soul from soul

—then she is not high-minded. Her judgment of Irene is that she made much ado about nothing in denying herself to Soames on this very ground; as for her, she gives herself freely to Michael—good old Michael, what was the use of making him suffer?—even when her soul is crying out for Jon. She never really recovers

from that fixation of her young affections; it is constancy—not levity—that finally kills her father and nearly kills her; she is not a sensual type. Only, like all love that wrecks human lives, hers is a fiercely possessive love, and there is much passion for self-gratification in it. ("She is a taker," says Irene to Jon, "and you are a giver.") This is not to suggest that Fleur would not have made Jon a good wife; Irene is wrong about that. There is nothing mean in Fleur; she married a man whom she did not love, and, her one great transgression aside, she must be admitted to have made him happy; she would certainly have done much more for Jon. Only, once Jon is denied her, her love for him, genuine as it is, is all mixed up with her love of self—the sense of women, says Meredith, is all confused with their senses—and it would take a wiser head than hers to tell where one ends and the other begins. She had been born with a silver spoon in her mouth; Jon was the first thing that had ever been denied her. It was a bitter piece of irony that he should have been the only thing she ever greatly wanted. Being what she was, she must inevitably drive on to the scene of her terrible woodland adultery, where she literally forces herself upon him—now the loving husband of another woman—and is, for the second time, cruelly cast off. "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom"; there are better ways of resolving such conflicts, but poor Fleur, who has had the misfortune to be brought up without religion, has never been trained to walk in them. It says a good deal for her that any road should have led her home at last.

The reader's kindness toward Fleur, despite all her faults, is, of course, largely a tribute to the skill with which Galsworthy has portrayed her. We see her in

a much wider variety of activities than we see Beatrix; by the time we have got through the *Saga* and the *Comedy* we have suffered with her in her young heartbreak over Jon; we have stood by her side through the agonies of motherhood; we have trembled for her soul when she flings her cap over the windmill; and we have tasted the salt tears of her bitter remorse when Soames is killed. To those who followed the successive instalments of her history as they originally appeared she seemed like a real person of whom one was always glad to have further news; and at least one reader, renewing his acquaintance with her, recently found himself trying to figure out how old she was today and what she might be doing in wartime England! It is worth remembering perhaps that when her father was killed, one London paper headlined the event—DEATH OF SOAMES FORSYTE—as if a man of flesh and blood had passed.

It may be partly because she surrenders to her passion that Fleur seems younger than Beatrix, and in some ways we get closer to her. It is easier to think of her as naked, for example; we should all feel some sense of impropriety if we were to go with Beatrix into her bath; we feel none when we accompany Fleur. But the quality that serves her best to win our tenderness is the endearing childlikeness she carries under all her surface sophistication. (And here, of course, she is utterly unlike Beatrix.) It crops out in every crisis. We see it when Desert goes away:

Fleur said, without moving:

"I want to be comforted."

Ah! she knew exactly what to say, how to say it! And going on his knees, he [Michael] began to comfort her.

We see it when Kit is born in the storm:

.... Nature, with the small "n," forcing fear into this girl he [Michael] loved so awfully! Na-

ture kicking up this godless din above her poor little head!

"Ducky, you'll have twilight sleep and know nothing about it; and be as right as rain in no time."

Fleur freed her hand.

"Not if it's not good for him. Is it?"

"I expect so, sweetheart; I'll find out. What makes you think—?"

"Only that it's not natural. I want to do it properly. Hold my hand hard, Michael. I—I'm not going to be a fool."

Above all, it comes out at the death of Soames:

"Yes, Dad, I will be good!"

The words are childish, trite beyond expression. But they are the right words for her.

So Fleur learned younger than her father the bitter truth against which both of them, like all egoists, have struggled so desperately, "that the condition of conquest is sacrifice." Wisdom comes to Soames through his love for her, the first selfless, unpropertied love he has ever known. And he can only pass that knowledge on to her whom he loves more than life itself by dying for her.

Yes! She had meant to be killed by that picture, ironically that of the Goya girl whose dress she had worn when she visited Jon's room at Wansdon, and when she danced with him at Nettlefold! Distraught that desperate night, she did not even now realise that she had caused the fire, by a cigarette flung down still lighted, not even perhaps that she had smoked up there. But only too well she realised that because she had wanted to die, had stood welcoming sudden extinction, her father was now lying there so nearly dead. How good he had always been to her! Incredible that he should die and take that goodness away, and that she should never hear his flat-toned voice again, or feel the touch of his moustache on her cheeks or forehead. Incredible that he should never give her a chance to show that she had really loved him—yes, really, beneath all the fret and self-importance of her life.

Fleur's brief reappearances in Galsworthy's last trilogy, *End of the Chapter*,

are not wholly satisfactory. In *Maid in Waiting*, particularly, she has nothing to do save drive Dinny and her friends about in her motor! But Galsworthy leaves us in no doubt that the promise she made her dying father has been kept. Very nearly the last words she speaks in *One More River* make the point inescapable:

"Of course I know what you've been through [she tells Dinny], but the past buries its dead. It is so, I've been through it, too. It's the present and the future that matter, and we're the present, and our children are the future."

But only her own soul knows what it has cost her to learn that. In some ways the

Fleur of *End of the Chapter* is much less attractive than the wilful girl we used to know. Something vivid, something lovable has died in her; she is too well controlled. And it is no wonder. To achieve such self-mastery a woman must either be a saint or else she must partly kill herself.

So, in the last analysis, the comparison between Fleur and Beatrix Esmond becomes a contrast. Beatrix's last years are a degradation redeemed only by her vitality; Fleur, like Gwendolen Harleth, though quite unemotionally, in her hard little post-war way, is saved, "as by fire."

## CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE—AN EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE<sup>1</sup>

SOPHUS KEITH WINTHER<sup>2</sup>

### I

The study of contemporary literature in our universities and colleges is not considered respectable by the scholars. They stand firmly together in their opposition to the demand for courses in contemporary authors and ideas. They must know that young men and women demand the right to study the literature of the world in which they live, but the scholars resist all these demands. Graduate students, young instructors, and a few of the older men recognize and demand year after year that contemporary literature should be a legitimate field of study in every department of English, but they get very little response from those who rule, and they have no opportunity to make their

demands heard. Those who rule do not consult their students or the underling teachers about policy or the course of study. They are too sure of the rightness of tradition to believe that democratic procedure should be a part of any planned course of study. They control the future of the graduate students' professional life; they continue in control after the student gets his degree and becomes an instructor. If he protests the course of study, if he asks for courses not in the curriculum, he jeopardizes his position and is branded as a person who does not co-operate. But those who plan his course never dream of co-operating with him. They live in the tradition of the past, perpetuating today the program that they were forced to accept in their youth. They had no courses in contemporary literature, so they see no reason why such courses should be offered now.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a talk made at the last annual meeting of the N.C.T.E.

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But it would be a mistake to attribute the practice of neglecting the contemporary field to a malicious plot on the part of those who control the English literature program. What they do is all in the interest of scholarship and in defense of the ideals by which they live. When they were graduate students they never had a course in contemporary literature that compared in quality with their courses in Chaucer and Shakespeare. Their standards and ideals—the embodiment of their youthful training—give them no basis on which to meet the demands for courses in the modern field. Their training makes it very difficult for them to recognize the possibility of considering contemporary literature as a field of study, nor can they understand how the methods and materials of scholarship can be applied to the literature of the recent past.

The professors are scarcely aware that there is a problem. They hear the voices of protest, but they pay no heed to them. Like the generals in the Maginot line, they admire the machinery they have perfected and doubt all rumors of new techniques and new weapons of attack. If they were given to singing, their theme would be, "It was good enough for Daniel and for David in his day, so I'm going home to glory in the good old-fashioned way." To which youth might reply, "Half of what they say is certainly truth."

Every course in the department of English that is raised to the dignity of graduate standing is conceived in this spirit. A professor of history introduces new courses in the contemporary field and assumes their need is obvious, but in a department of literature this is scarcely ever done. Only courses that follow traditional patterns from Old English to Pope are considered indispensable. The

Romantic period is gradually gaining recognition, but it must be remembered that it is still as a field of study not considered indispensable. And the contemporary is not even recognized.

This does not mean that no courses in the modern field are offered; it only means that they are weak, insignificant, and often given by incompetent men. If a department were choosing a new professor for the Renaissance period, every effort would be made to get a person who was a recognized scholar in his field. This procedure is basic, taken for granted, and, of course, quite right and proper. But notice the difference, and in this difference lies the greatest evil; if a man were being selected for the modern field he would be held to no such standards. In the first place the subject matter would not be recognized as a field. Next, the attitude would be that anyone could handle such courses. They could be given to some person who had proved his incompetence in recognized fields of study, to some person who for one reason or another had to be supported by the university in spite of his qualifications as a professor.

A specific example drawn from actual practice may emphasize the point. At a big university in the East certain members of the English department agitated for a course in contemporary literature. When it became apparent to those in power that resistance to this move was no longer desirable, they took advantage of what appeared to them as an attractive opportunity. An aging librarian was to be replaced by a young and well-qualified man, but since the incumbent had given many years of his life to the university he could not be left without support. The president offered him to the English department, and he was gratefully accepted as the new professor of

courses in the contemporary field. He had no real qualification for the work either by training, intellect, or point of view. His reading was limited. He knew no foreign languages; his conception of the ultimate extreme in the realistic novel that would be safe for the tender minds of his students was Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* And this actual situation could be duplicated in almost every English department in the country. It reveals a situation that is sickening to those who believe that the modern field should receive serious consideration, but to the older scholars it is not even considered as a problem. They accept such situations with equanimity or pass them off with a jest; yet, and again this must be emphasized, if any department treated the study of Chaucer or the Renaissance in this manner it would be thoroughly discredited.

But the problem is not so simple as it might seem, nor is the disregard for competent scholars in the modern field entirely the result of a vicious disrespect for contemporary literature. Suppose a department committee were considering the development of a genuine seminar in the contemporary field, where would they find a professor qualified in the same sense that men might qualify for the older periods? They might look at the scholarly journals to see who was publishing in the field, but that would be a disappointing venture. It is true that they would find occasional articles on contemporary authors, but if they read these articles they might not feel very enthusiastic.

The reason for this is simple enough, and it is basic to the whole problem. The scholarly journals are devoted to a source-hunting technique of research that has served its purpose admirably in studying the past but lends only a dustless chaff when applied to the moderns. Contem-

porary authors studied from this point of view yield nothing that is either interesting or valuable, nor do such articles reflect either intelligence or understanding in the writer. A committee searching for a professor in the contemporary field would most surely give up in despair if it had to rely upon the journals to reveal some scholar in the field under consideration. The whole situation suggests a vicious circle. It is impossible to develop genuine courses in the modern field because no qualified professors are available, and none are available because there are no courses. This is Alice-in-Wonderland logic, yet it has been good enough to defeat more than one effort at remedying a very bad situation.

If not in the journals, then where would information of the scholars be found who could develop the modern field? The answer is that they must be found among the young men who have studied the contemporary field in spite of all the opposition and discouragement that such courses have encountered. Young men with a vital interest in contemporary literature are present in every graduate school. Perhaps they are undisciplined in their enthusiasm, but given an opportunity they would soon prove their worth. They should be given opportunities for publication, not in the old journals but in new ones. Scholarships and research foundations should be set up to give them aid. All the excellent paraphernalia which has aided the scholars in the older fields should be made available for the students of contemporary literature.

## II

Before this can be done, many difficult problems must be solved. Objectives must be clearly defined. It must be understood definitely that no one wishes to make a department of English sub-

servient to the modern field, but just as emphatically it must be stated that not all scholarship need be in bondage to the past. It must be understood that the culture of the twentieth century is as profound a challenge to the student as is the culture of any past century. If it is important that a student of literature know the argument in *Piers Plowman*, so is it also very important that he know the deadly conflict between Settembrini and Naphtha. The psychology of Raskolnikov is as vital a problem as that of Iago; Bazarov's philosophy as much of an intellectual challenge as Christian's; and surely André Gide's theories of the novel are as complex as those of Fielding. The poetry of Millay is as disturbing in its beauty as that of Rossetti; and the plays of Eugene O'Neill hold the mirror up to nature as truly as do those of Congreve.

Perhaps this is obvious. What is not clear, at least to many people, is how literature of modern times can be made a part of graduate study. This is not an idle nor an irrelevant speculation, for graduate study, research, and publications are the measuring devices by which a person is recognized in our profession. The pattern a student may follow is clearly fixed and expertly defined for the study of the past, and on the basis of that pattern the professor regards with apprehensive skepticism the possibility of scholarly research in any contemporary field. The highways to research in the literature of the past are clearly marked, and the vehicle in which the student rides is a marvel of inventive genius, the result of generations of careful study; but are there no new highways being built into the wilderness of the modern world; are there no new modes of travel being devised? To answer in the negative would be to admit a shameful defeat. Endless

scratching in the chaff of a well-thrashed past for the precious seed of an idea is not the only avenue open to the scholar today.

English and American writers of the twentieth century have been as conscious of their relation to every aspect of the world as any group of writers that ever lived. They have recognized the psychological aspects and the profound cultural implications of research in every phase of modern science. Their works in poetry, drama, and the novel reflect the human implications of researches in science that range from genetics to astronomy. The modern writers have reflected in their work everything from the relativity of time and space to the psychopathology of everyday life. They have faithfully held the mirror up to nature and in so doing have given our age understanding and insight into its most complex problems. No field for graduate study requires more ingenuity on the part of the student than does our own age, and no material could be offered to the student that would test better his understanding and judgment.

But if a student would master the problems so abundant in contemporary literature, he must have more than a casual acquaintance with modern thought. His training should include a background in the physical sciences broad enough to prepare him for understanding the works of Jennings, Morgan, Eddington, and others who have made the findings in astronomy and genetics familiar to the nonspecialist. He should be trained in sociology, economics, and especially psychology—he should have a firm grasp on the nature of the world in which he lives, where the emphasis is upon substance as well as form.

We are living in the present—in a new world—a world that is becoming newer and more complex with each passing day.

Every other field of research except literature has recognized this fact and has made an attempt to solve both aspects of the problem. They have been forced to new methods of research in order to meet new problems. If the problem for the teachers of literature presents unusual difficulties, all the more reason why they should accept the challenge. It is a challenge, and the hour is later than many people realize.

### III

Once, long ago, a graduate school in literature could be divinely unaffected by the practical problems of a great democracy. Learning was for the few, the elect, a privileged class. Graduate courses were for scholars whose problems had nothing to do with the education of the masses—they were not even faced with the necessity of training thousands of young men and women to teach in thousands of high schools throughout the land. The high schools, where they did exist, were not demanding courses in contemporary literature. The problem from that point of view is so well known that to elaborate would be painful.

Today the situation is quite different. Colleges and universities are engaged in mass education, and this by its very nature implies an entirely different conception of what their function is. Where in the past they were serving the elect few who sought a cultivated knowledge of literature as one of the arts, they are now confronted with students who look to the study of literature as one of the answers to the difficult task of living in a modern world. How modern this world is may be dimly surmised, even though no certain answer can be given, but there are some negative aspects that may be defined with relative assurance.

When the United Nations bring this

war to a victorious conclusion, they will hope to apply the great freedoms to which their leaders have pledged them. When that time comes "business as usual" will be a forgotten ideal. So will English studies as usual, philosophy as usual, and everything else that in the past was accepted as a self-evident truth. Upon the professors who work in the humanities will rest the task of redefining the ideals by which men live.

Never before in the Western world has the challenge been as great as it is now or shortly will be. The scientists have made this new world. Their technique is a living force as powerful as the elements with which they work. Great as their progress has been in a world at war, what they will accomplish in a world at peace defies the possibility of prediction. They create the physical aspect of culture; but in the arts it is defined and made meaningful in terms of human values and relationships. Science can provide the means; artists create the ends. The professor of literature has the serious responsibility of interpreting the artist to his students, not to a few select students but to the many who will come to the universities of the future. The position of the professor is shifting from that of the learned and esoteric scholar to that of the teacher of the masses. His problem is becoming as complex as the world in which he lives. If he is successful, he will not sacrifice one single part of his past achievements, but he will add to those achievements a responsibility for the present. If he fails in this, he faces the certain prospect of becoming a weak appendage to a composition staff with exercises in grammar as its only objective. If he succeeds, he will find no conflict between his work and science or between the contemporary and the ancient. The day will come when men realize that it is infinitely easier to

make a living than it is to learn how to live. The professor of literature must recognize that teaching how to live is the ultimate goal of all his work, and in the pursuit of that objective the study of contemporary literature is an educational imperative.

#### IV

In the socially conscious world of tomorrow the study of literature will more than ever be the medium through which the ideals of the past will be redefined in the light of the present. The professors of literature must recognize that or become silent actors in a dumb show. They must realize that their individual field of study is not an end in itself but a part of the living world of the present. For many professors this may mean a revaluation of values. Instead of believing and acting as though the more complete knowledge of the past were the ultimate objective, the scholar must face the present and seek the knowledge of the past as a means to the more complete understanding of today. He must recognize that fact if the study of literature is to survive as a vital force in the modern college curriculum—if it is to serve a living need in the lives of the thousands and yet more thousands of students who will come to our universities.

This is not so radical a point of view as it might seem at first glance. It has always been assumed that the study of literature was a cultural necessity, but, by implication if not by direct statement, it has also been assumed that it was for the few who could appreciate a cloistered and esoteric ideal. This aspect of literary study has been most clearly expressed in the graduate courses, where pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has been the implicit objective. As this system developed in perfection it tended to exhaust the thing it fed upon until form be-

came more important than substance. Here, as in many other manifestations of human endeavor that grow powerful through a perfect organization, the shift was away from the pursuit of knowledge to a study of the means by which knowledge had once been acquired. The graduate seminar followed a well-known pattern—it became more and more “What oft before’s been said, but ne’er so well expressed.” Against this point of view there is a growing voice of protest from the graduate students in all parts of the country. They object to the idea that graduate study is a technique, a manner and method of approach to knowledge.

Their protest may often be irrational, and they may lack an understanding of the whole program of graduate study, but to dismiss their objections with the comfortable assumption that all is well with the status quo is not only wrong; it may be fatal. It is quite possible that certain types of research have served their historical purpose, have made their contribution to culture, and are no longer applicable to the new world that lies before us.

The new emphasis in the world of today is upon social values. If our program is to meet the needs of today, it may be necessary to revise our whole curriculum in relation to a new objective, and this may involve the development of new techniques in our research program. In other fields of study the need for a change in point of view has been recognized, and a new orientation toward the needs of today has been the guiding principle of such revision and modification as has been achieved. In philosophy, history, and sociology the problems of today are considered of primary importance, while with literature labor in the vineyards of the past often bears a tasteless and unnourishing fruit.

Scholarship in English literature is so divorced from the life of the people that it has no active influence in directing the thought or shaping the ideals of the present-day world. If this continues in the future as it has in the past, professors of literature will be even more isolated than they have been, because the students are becoming more conscious of what they want. They will resent tomorrow more completely than they do today the ideal of the ivory tower. They have not yet deserted. They are still inviting the professor to meet them in the market place. If he refuses, they will abandon him. The fate of his subject will be that of the classics.

## V

Addition of courses in the literature of the twentieth century will not solve all the problems that the new world presents to every department of English. Such a generalization would be absurd, but it would be equally queer to assume that there is no connection between the present program and the reluctance manifest everywhere to recognize modern literature as a legitimate field of study. There is a connection, and the relationship lies in a limited conception of what graduate study is or should be. Many professors of English in every field from Old English to the nineteenth century have recognized this fact. No doubt every faculty has made some effort to meet the issue.

In seeking an answer to the problem the professors should not dissipate their energies in a vain quibbling over what has been done. Instead they should concentrate with a vigorous affirmation on what may be done when they abandon the aristocratic ideal and the sheltered privilege of a dead past. They may have to leave behind them much that they have cherished in the past, but, if

they look to and accept the challenge of the future, they will have little time for regret.

First of all they need to accept the basic idea that the validity of all their work depends upon its applicability to a better understanding of the world in which they live—the world of today. This does not mean that the search for the author of *Piers Plowman* need be abandoned, but it does mean that such a pursuit should be recognized in its proper perspective. Professors may still devote their lives to solving the problem of the enclitic *de*, but its relative importance should be recognized. The study of literature should be in the classroom and the seminar what literature is in reality—the story of how a creative artist tried to wring some meaning for mankind out of a tangled and planless cosmos.

In so far as this is the approach most often made by the professor, the study of literature is still a living force. To augment such strength as they have, a complete course in contemporary literature should be of foremost importance in every college and university in the country. To treat it as a stepchild is not only wrong; it is ominous. The English program should include complete lower- and upper-division courses, leading for the few to pro-seminar and graduate seminar studies in the contemporary field. Such a program should relax no requirements, and least of all should contemporary literature be a substitute for the study of Chaucer or Old English. It might be necessary to require an extra year of study for the advanced degree in contemporary literature in order to make it not only an important degree but one of distinction. The modern field could be made the best possible introduction to creative scholarship, for no other field deals more directly with the very ends

toward which the study of literature aims. The addition of contemporary literature to the English program could have a deep cultural significance for all the professors as well as for the students. It would stimulate an interest in new journals whose influence would go beyond the narrow confines of professional studies, and through these publications it

might be possible to reach the intelligent reader who is not in the profession. If the critical study of Robert Frost were made as important as the study of John Skelton, the English program in the universities would come a little closer to exercising the active influence upon society which in the future will be its only justification.

### FRESHMAN COURSES IN ENGLISH IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN SOUTH AFRICA

A. G. HOOPER<sup>1</sup>

I have read with much interest several articles on freshman English which have appeared in *College English* and its predecessor during the last few years. I have done so because the level of education reached by freshmen in American and South African universities seems to me to be about the same, and because many of the problems confronting those responsible for freshman courses in the two countries are the same.<sup>2</sup>

What has struck me about the various articles on the subject in *College English*—and, for that matter, about the various courses offered for first-year students in universities in the United States, South Africa, and England—is that so often one plan merely substitutes one literary period for another, or study of one literary form for another, of one writer or one book for another, of one regional litera-

ture for another, or advocates more intensive study of grammar and composition, or less, by this method or that, or proposes to add or do away with a history of the language course—and so on.

The reasons for the preference for one literary course rather than another seem to be a belief that this rather than that is more likely to arouse the interest of the students and is therefore more likely to allow the development in them of a "love of literature"; and the reasons for the preference for one form of linguistic drill rather than another are allegedly that this rather than that will enable them to avoid certain mistakes in speaking and writing and be by that much more grammatically "correct."

The choice of one course rather than another should, it seems to me, depend upon our opinion of what a university education ought to do for students. It seems to me that the primary aim of a university should be to make its students think. If you can get them to think for themselves, and think scientifically, your other problems are solved; and in an English department interest in literature in any form, progress in the difficult art

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<sup>2</sup> May I explain that these opinions are based on two years' experience in America, spent almost entirely at Yale University, and seven years in South Africa; and add that at the University of the Witwatersrand we have in the English department some 250-300 first-year students, for about 90 per cent of whom English is the home language.

of interpretation and in the equally difficult art of self-expression will follow. Too much emphasis has been put on grammar. Language is an instrument of thought; and to try by means of composition classes and more and more drill in grammar and syntax to teach students the trick of producing neat little linguistic molds into which they can drop any thoughts they may happen to have is to put the cart before the horse.

The difficulty, of course, is to get them to think scientifically. When I asked a group of first-year students what they expected to get out of a university education, one eventually suggested this "thinking scientifically" and was quite properly asked what he meant by the phrase. Well, it meant approaching a problem objectively, impersonally, disinterestedly, impartially, dispassionately—which was only defining by synonyms and got us nowhere. After a lot of discussion it was agreed that it meant, perhaps, approaching a problem with an open mind and with no preconceived ideas, meant looking for all the available evidence in any way connected with the problem, meant weighing all the evidence and coming to a conclusion which took all the evidence into account and explained (and didn't merely overlook) apparent contradictions.

It should not matter what subject is chosen for study; the approach suggested should be the same. In the process of developing the habit of thinking scientifically the student may acquire a certain amount of information which may be of practical use to him later. The amount of directly useful information which a student may acquire in, say, the departments of medicine or engineering may be much greater than in some other departments. And it is perhaps easier for the student of natural sciences to cultivate

the habit of thinking scientifically than it is, e.g., for the student of social sciences: The student of natural sciences can repeat an experiment in conditions as nearly identical with those described by a colleague thousands of miles away as can be hoped for in this world, and can come to the same conclusion, whereas two students of the social sciences who carry out the same experiment have to deal with matters of opinion and not always with matters of fact, and may come to very different conclusions. But the important thing is that acquisition of knowledge should not be the primary aim at the university; it is the method that matters. And, whatever the subject, the approach should be the same.

What is the best way of making this approach in an English department? One big difficulty in the teaching of English is that students are learning English all the time; in fact a larger proportion of their time is spent in learning it outside an English department than inside. Students learn it from other members of staff, in every department, from their relations and friends, from newspapers and magazines, from the radio and talkies.

The subject matter to be discussed in an English department should therefore be as wide and varied as the interests of the students, and not be confined entirely to literature—which is merely one special use of language. Students *may* be taught to think clearly for themselves if we show them examples of clarity in thought (and therefore in expression) in "pure" literature; but they can be taught more easily to do so if we show them examples of muddled and crooked thinking from any and every source (from advertisements, political speeches, newspaper leaders and articles, propaganda, public addresses by well-known men including

university presidents and professors), and get them in the habit of questioning every phrase that is not clear to them, and of coming to their own decision whether they or the writers and/or speakers were to blame for the obscurity and why.

How is this best done? Not by composition classes, précis, extra theme-writing of one kind or another, courses in Spenser instead of in Milton, in Blake and Shelley instead of in Shakespeare or what you will, or history of the language courses. It happens that we have just dropped our history of the language course for freshmen—not because we think it of no value but because it does not do best in a limited time the job of serving what we believe should be the primary aim: to teach students to think scientifically. A history of the language course may do this in part if sufficient emphasis is placed on the *method* by which our knowledge has been acquired; but, all too often, even in this department, a knowledge of such and such has been regarded as an end in itself instead of as a means to an end.

From experience we have found that the best method we have tried so far of getting students—in all years—in the habit of thinking scientifically is by a course in Basic English combined with semantics. Courses in semantics are by now fairly common; courses in Basic English are, as far as I know, not as com-

mon as they deserve to be. Nothing we have tried compels students as Basic does to think for themselves. The nature of the task compels them to read to understand as no similar task does. It's often a startling experience for them to discover, when they try to put a passage into Basic, just exactly what linguistic tricks have been performed under their noses without their noticing them. Let them try putting into Basic a few advertisements, political speeches, newspaper leaders, propaganda statements, as well as passages from purely "literary" sources, and note the superiority or inferiority of a Basic version, and they will learn that way better than any other the reasons for the frequency of partial communication and the way in which advantage can be taken of the undiscerning reader or hearer by unscrupulous people, as well as the way in which the literary man gets his effects. That's the way they can learn how language behaves and how it works. After even half a term at it they develop such a greater awareness of language that their ability to read as well as write improves markedly.

It's not my purpose here to defend Basic English against those objections, usually frivolous, made against it usually by people who know nothing of it or its purpose and who are too lazy to make the effort to learn something about it. I will only say—it works.

## THE COURSE IN LITERATURE APPRECIATION FOR THE TECHNOLOGY STUDENT

D. R. ANGUS<sup>1</sup>

How thoroughly, in this total war, the universities are eventually to be made over into training camps for technicians we can only surmise; but nobody doubts that we are in for an unparalleled increase in the percentage of students enrolled in the practical sciences. The situation in itself will bring about a definite restriction of college courses in literature. On top of this, however, we have the present nation-wide urge to eliminate all activities not essential to the winning of the war. The statement of the American admiral quoted in the *New York Times* of February 22, 1942, presents a point of view too widely held and too reasonable to be easily dismissed:

When my ship goes into action I don't care a damn whether my officers can tell a Chopin étude from a Bayeux tapestry, or an iambic pentameter from an aquatint. I want officers who can navigate ships. . . .

Yet few of us will be convinced that we must eliminate completely from the education of students in technology their one opportunity in a lifetime to receive expert training in how and what to read for pleasure. There probably never has been a war in which the nation has succeeded in utilizing all the waking hours of its soldiery and workmen. Recreation still remains a vital necessity to both groups, and from the rigors of modern military training and high-speed production reading should be a very natural form of relaxation. If, by taking up a small fraction of the student's time, we

have generally raised the standard of this reading, we have probably not been inefficient in the long run or at all endangered the war effort.

We cannot, however, justify even a limited teaching of literature appreciation to students of technology during the next few years if we are not prepared to make that teaching efficient to the utmost degree, to make it a worth-while experience for the student. This is assuredly a time for a reconsideration of the basic aims and legitimate methods of this course.

It will be well for us to re-examine the principles by which we have selected the reading material. If we must pare down our allotment of time, we must also pare down the amount of material to be read. We cannot now bewilder these students with an overambitious reading program. More than ever before—and it has certainly always been true—the literature-appreciation course for students in the applied sciences should itself be a pleasurable recreation from activities in the machine-shop and laboratory. It should not be associated with the unpleasantness of a reading program that may seem reasonable to the teacher but which may appear unduly burdensome to students who are unaccustomed to reading.

If we English teachers would only retain clearly and steadily in view the fact that the aim of this course is not primarily to acquaint the student with the great classics or to teach him the facts of literary history but to get him interested

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in good literature, particularly literature of his own time, and to get him to read it critically, the choosing of subject matter for the course, now so frequently arbitrary and confused, would at once be greatly simplified. The questions of how much poetry is to be read and how much prose or of how many great classics are to be read and how many of the better contemporary works could then be viewed in the light of this basic purpose.

The answer to the first question would immediately be obvious. The study of fine prose—the novel, essay, drama, and short story—should definitely outweigh the study of poetry. The average English teacher has only to ask himself what the bulk of his own reading for pleasure is in order to find the correct answer. If he gets his greatest pleasure from reading prose, how much more likely is the less cultured student of technology also to get his greatest pleasure from reading this type of literature.

The check, of course, against leaning too far in this direction is the greater difficulty in teaching the appreciation of poetry. It simply takes more time to teach these students how to read poetry than it does to teach them how to read prose. For this reason alone a somewhat greater proportion of class discussion must be devoted to poetry than the basic purpose of the course would otherwise justify. For the same reason, however, it should be recognized that not much more poetry should be assigned for outside reading than can be covered in class discussion.

With regard to the second decision to be made—as to how many classics and how many contemporary works are to be studied—one rule should be followed rigidly. No classics should be read which cannot definitely interest the members of

the class. It will be difficult to get these students to enjoy reading Chaucer, although not nearly so difficult as it will be to get them to enjoy reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*; while assigning certain less popular plays of Shakespeare simply because they are Shakespeare's may so bore the student as to shut him off permanently from all that is valuable in the great dramatist's masterpieces.

It is in the study of prose fiction, however, particularly in the study of the novel, that the teacher is most prone to error in this respect. Form—the ultimate criterion for adjudging a work of art to be a classic—is less important here than it is in other types of literature. The whole theory of classicism is open to question when applied to the novel. It is doubtful whether there is such a thing as a classic English novel. It is doubtful whether any novel written in the past surpasses very greatly the best novels being written today. The usual impression of the general reader from even the so-called classic novels is one of a rather tedious, long-winded style and themes based on issues long since dead. The reading of *Tom Jones*, *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, *The Way of All Flesh*, *The Return of the Native*, or *The Old Wives' Tale* will more often diminish than increase the interest of these students in the novel. On the other hand, a careful and comprehending selection of the best novels of recent times for the reading assignments of these students will be one of the most valuable contributions that the English teacher can make to their intellectual development. It may result in their first awakening to the pregnant issues of the day and may present before their startled eyes for the first time the incredible beauty and ugliness, the endlessly intriguing mystery, of the people among whom they live. They will have

questions to ask and things to say about these novels.

Clearly, it is not within the scope of this paper to attempt even a summary of how English literature is to be taught. There are, however, a few practices so obviously inconsistent with the basic aims of a literature course for students of technology that one can only be amazed at their continued prevalence. It is high time that the fallacy of these methods be recognized clearly by all teachers of the course.

While it is true that this course must be made as much as possible a pleasant experience for the student, it is also true that to be successful it must also involve considerable hard work for the student. It is apparently quite easy for this class of student to side-step practically all contact with literature in high school, so that generally in his college course he has come face to face with completely strange subject matter and has entered a realm largely moved by forces utterly mysterious and incomprehensible to him. He does, however, understand the memorizing of facts and if left to his own initiative will attempt to study literature in this way. Far too many teachers, finding this the line of least resistance, follow the lead of the student. Instead of lifting the student up to the course, they lower the course down to the student. The professor who says, "You've got to ask them for facts" and who spends his class periods preparing his students to answer factual questions is wasting his time and theirs. Arnold's statement that for poetry "the idea is everything" and the rest "a world of illusion" is as true today as it ever was. Not the facts but the ideas, emotions, and sensuous impressions are the things that matter in poetry. Knowledge of these is criticism, and this is an elementary course in

criticism, strange as it may seem to many who teach it and to that student who responded to a certain type of examination with the complaint, "But you are asking us to criticize this book, sir!"

So essential is it that these students themselves get this idea clearly and strongly that no device for fixing it in their minds can be neglected. Texts of the reading material, for example, should always be brought to the examination, if for no other reason than to make the students see that they are not being required to memorize the substance of the material being read. At no time throughout the course should factual information not utilized in support of a critical idea be given credit. These students generally place a high estimate on the ability to think systematically in their own chosen fields. By openly praising clearheaded thinking over futile memorization, the instructor will usually set at work whatever thinking potentiality the class contains.

It is the instructor's job to provide these students with the essential terminology, as well as some workable plan for a sound, if rather simple, critical analysis. It is difficult for us to realize how much our job is one of teaching an unfamiliar jargon to our students in this course, to realize how nearly down to rock bottom we have to go to provide them with the simplest critical vocabulary. All too frequently we start off blithely, talking about romanticism and classicism to students for whom the words mean absolutely nothing; or, if we define romanticism, we call it "the renaissance of wonder," "the return to medievalism," or "the development of humanitarianism"—all of which helps the situation not at all.

In teaching the appreciation of the novel in this course, time limitations will

not permit us to wander very far from the basic aesthetic values of this literary form. These students should be taught to look for the larger theme of the novel and to follow the ramifications of the novelist's thought as it is peculiarly expressed in fiction. They should be taught to expect in the finest novels a more advanced philosophy of life, to look there for the criticism of society most likely to be free from that controlled propaganda that has stalked them from the day of their birth. They should be taught to appreciate in these novels originality and imaginative penetration beneath the surface of human nature, for these qualities, along with that profounder social criticism, distinguish most clearly what is valuable in fiction from what is valueless. But the teaching of the novel is a personal matter, more an art than a science; and these students will in varying degrees be infected with the enthusiasm of the instructor as he discusses what he himself finds most interesting. If we avoid factualism in our own role and discourage it in our students at all times and have selected the novels to be read with our eye on the purpose of the course we are teaching, we cannot go far wrong—both the students and the novelists will see to that.

To neglect the teaching of short-story appreciation in this course is unforgivable. There is probably no greater tragedy involved in the reading habits of our time than that our newsstands should be packed with the superficial and monotonous slick-story and pulp magazines. That this trash is being so widely read is all the more to be regretted when it is recognized that the short story is the one form of creative writing which may be said to be truly flowering in our day. The finest stories the world has ever seen are being produced in our time and pro-

duced prolifically. It is as much a part of the teacher's task to tell his students where these finer stories are to be found, at the same time decrying in the harshest terms he can muster the stereotyped product of the popular magazines, as it is his task to teach them how to read the short story. In most schools the short-story collections now being used follow the historical-development pattern; and there is, of course, something to be said for presenting the high lights in the development of this form, if only to emphasize the predominant contribution of American writers. But the emphasis should all be on the study of the contemporary model, freed from sentimentalism, type restrictions, and conventional plotting. This modern short story is truly, as Edward J. O'Brien termed it, a slice-of-life story and should be studied as such. The same general approach to appreciating it should be made as is applied to the novel, with the added notice of its more stringent requirements of economy and unity.

Undoubtedly, the most difficult problem of the entire course is to teach these students of technology to read poetry, for many of them little more intelligible at first than a foreign language. Here especially we cannot permit them to chase factual butterflies, however much they want to do so; neither can we even permit them to read entirely the type of poem they like best to read, that is, the narrative poem. More important still, we cannot hope to introduce them to poetry by the methods of the historical approach. The task of teaching them how to read poetry is in itself simply too demanding for this. Probably the main reason why poetry appreciation is so rarely conveyed to these students is that they are never provided with a text designed to meet the essential purpose of

the course. Practically every anthology of poetry used in this course has been based on a historical approach to literature and has followed a chronological order. It is an axiom of education, however, that one moves from the easy to the difficult. Practically every other course of the college curriculum follows this procedure; why then do we attempt to teach our students how to read "Lines Written above Tintern Abbey" or "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" before we take up "The Lady of Shallott"? Why, for that matter, do we try to teach an understanding of the complex processes of English cultural development as shown in poetry before we have made sure that the students know what poetry is?

Obviously, then, these students should first be introduced to poems carefully classified according to their emphasis upon some one of the basic poetic values and graded on a scale of increasing complexity and profundity. In studying these poems the student should never be allowed to forget that he has not really read a poem until he comprehends the idea which it contains. He should be taught that the basic values of poetry lie in its ideas, its emotions, its imagery, and its word music. He should be taught to recognize these values when they are present and to estimate the relative importance of each in any particular poem. Application of such a simple formula of

criticism will usually appear reasonable and efficient in the student of technology, and he will gain confidence and interest from using it.

From here on, the course procedure is largely uncharted. The things that can be said about poetic ideas, imagery, emotions, and word music are as boundless and varied as is human intelligence. In this later stage of the course the history of human intelligence and feeling will enter in varying degrees. We must face fairly, however, the possibility that under present conditions, with regard both to the high-school preparation of these students and to the time available for their college courses in English, it is questionable whether the historical criticism of poetry can be touched upon to any considerable degree.

The outline of course procedure presented in the preceding paragraphs involves not a little sacrifice on the part of the teacher. This is not the method of teaching literature he has learned from his own experiences as an undergraduate and graduate student. It calls for a somewhat further submission of his personal interests to the needs of his class. The reward, however, should lie in the increased pleasure that comes from addressing a more responsive audience and the satisfaction arising from a surer conviction of the practicality and general usefulness of the work he is doing.

## THE HUMANITIES AND THE WAR

### A SURVEY OF OPINION ON A PROPOSAL TO ACT TO PRESERVE THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES

A proposal to take action to protect the teaching of the humanities was submitted for publication in *College English* by Professor Warner G. Rice of the University of Michigan and Professor Howard Mumford Jones of Harvard University. In mimeographed form it was sent to fifty college teachers who were asked to consider whether they would approve or reject the proposal and to state their reasons. Not all the teachers sent in their replies in time for use in the present issue of *College English*, but the editors believe that the available responses are sufficiently numerous and varied to be worth summarizing for our readers. It is important that any action which may be taken should represent the judgment of the largest possible number of teachers whose interests are involved.

The text<sup>1</sup> of the proposal follows:

#### THE HUMANITIES AND THE WAR

In the emergency now existing the following propositions must command general assent:

- (1) The humanities and humane studies are being put in jeopardy by the present war effort,
- (2) The continued existence of the humanities is necessary if proper world organization and an enduring peace—the proper fruits of victory—are to be achieved, and
- (3) If the humanities are to be preserved, farsighted and decisive action must be immediately taken.

Because the United States is fighting (like its allies) for the right to survive and, surviving, to

<sup>1</sup> [Messrs. Rice and Jones framed their proposal long before the Army-Navy announcement of December 17. Although they and the commentators might phrase their ideas somewhat differently now, presumably they hold approximately the same views as before. Therefore, revision being impracticable, the materials are presented here in their original form.—EDITOR.]

maintain its own form of civilization, service in or for the armed forces of the republic is inevitably foremost in the thinking of loyal citizens. And because the war is a titanic battle of machines, one demanding innumerable technical skills, it is natural that government should call upon colleges and universities to train young men and women by hundreds and by thousands for various technical branches of the Army, the Navy, or the Flying Corps. The colleges and universities have vigorously responded, instituting special curricula, setting aside space and equipment for military or naval uses, gladly lending their faculty members to the government, and thus constituting themselves indispensable adjuncts to existing naval, military, and technical training schools. The war is gigantic and will in all probability be long and costly. The colleges have no desire to refrain from the conflict. Rather, they wish to do their full part.

Nevertheless, the very zeal of these institutions, coupled with the probable truth that the war will be long, raises a serious question as to the purport of higher education in this republic and of its significance to the state. If it be a primary duty of American colleges to do all they can to win the war, it is equally their duty, fundamentally a more important duty, not merely to win the war but also to make the war worth winning, by preserving those elements of a humane and liberal education upon which, in the last analysis, the existence of the liberal state, the aims and purposes of its life, depend. But unfortunately no responsible body has thus far thought out an answer to the crucial question:

"How far can colleges of liberal arts (whether separately established, or parts of universities) become in fact technical schools for training the operatives of highly complex and delicate machines of destruction for the duration of a long and costly struggle, without endangering or obliterating those arts of peace out of which must come a renewed life for the nation and for the world?"

It may be said that if the nation falls, the

colleges will fall with it; and if the nation survives, the question may be solved after the peace. The dilemma is illusory. We do not admit that the nation will fall; and we hold that the nature of the peace and of our national life thereafter depends in important degree upon the survival of the humane tradition in higher education, if the assumption that the colleges of today educate the citizens of tomorrow has any validity whatsoever.

Although colleges and universities are not the sole guardians of our cultural and social heritage, they are a primary means whereby the inheritance of the traditions of liberal civilization is assured. Perhaps too few Americans realize that this country is one of the last remaining homes of humane education. Over most of the continent of Europe university life has been obliterated by tyranny. Great Britain is a fortress, and the British universities have suffered the fate of the besieged. Throughout the British Empire, too, institutions of higher learning are more and more absorbed into the war machine. Whatever may remain of a once great intellectual tradition in unoccupied France and the French empire is dormant or dead. In Japan academic institutions have become instruments of the state; in China they are reduced to skeletons by war; in India they are convulsed by politics. Excellent as are many historic universities to the south of us, they do not have resources at present adequate to the great world problem. Only in the United States is there a possibility of adequately preserving for the duration of the conflict the life and virtues of humane education.

Now no one doubts the necessity for technological military and naval training in our colleges. But if the life of the liberal college is more and more drained into this endeavor, and if the war and the resultant anarchy are to be long, the logic of this program can scarcely prevent the colleges from becoming, as it were, duplicates of the technological schools which our enemies have substituted for the colleges they have destroyed.

A liberal state will not be maintained by a younger generation trained principally as mechanicians and in the arts of war. The instruments of culture cannot safely be left mainly in the hands of the elderly, the incompetent, and the infirm. The aftermath of World War I included a psychological conflict of the generations that did great damage, and a similar conflict after this war will do even greater damage

if it is not warded off. Our whole educational system, officered by teachers trained in the liberal arts and nourishing the whole life of the state, depends upon the assumption that a rich, humane, and sturdy intellectual life will always emanate from the colleges and universities. Moreover, the intricate reorganization of our civilian life in war requires skilful leadership that can spring only from a generous concept of man and of the state. Complex as were the post-war problems of the first world conflict, those consequent upon the present strife will be greater; and, unless the process of national and international readjustment is carefully directed, disaster must follow. Deeper and more fundamental still is the ancient truth that without vision the people perish. Not merely the science of social life but the very ideal of humanity is at the heart of our struggle. When the spiritual life of the nation is in question, church and school prove their value. Fortunately the life of the church is not now endangered in the same way by urgent military policy as is the life of the humane tradition.

Our enemies gladly kill this tradition wherever they can. In the realm of the mind and soul (and the present war is an ideological conflict) it is their chief enemy. It is, therefore, tragically necessary that there shall not, because of the mechanical nature of the weapons of conflict, be innocently inflicted upon the spiritual life of our country the same serious or mortal wounds our enemies are vengefully anxious to administer. That the values at stake are intangible unfortunately does not mean that they cannot be killed by our own neglect.

Because no responsible body has enunciated an educational policy upon this fundamental and (it may be) tragic issue, we call upon the government and upon educational administrators for an immediate facing of the problem.

To this end the President of the United States should be urged, by educational leaders and friends of the humanities everywhere, to appoint a commission charged with the study of the best means of preserving the life of the liberal colleges as liberal colleges during and after the present struggle.

Among the topics which such a commission might consider are these: the relation of the Selective Service to American undergraduates of whatever age and the postponement of their induction or exemption from military service in certain specific nontechnical categories; the creation of programs of civilian study comparable

to the various military and naval training programs now open to undergraduates and carrying, if need be, similar privileges with reference to deferment; the creation also of training centers in the colleges for problems of peace, both technical and general; the institution, where necessary, of new courses in the humanities for all students, whether potential officers or not; the adoption of a policy allowing the deferment of younger teachers which is at least comparable to that already in force with reference to ministers and divinity students; ways and means of financing liberal arts colleges threatened with extinction by the operation of the draft; ways of requiring through the colleges a more widespread understanding of the purpose and ideal of the liberal state, of scholarship, and of the arts as a precious portion of the life of man; and any other mode of maintaining, even in war, and primarily for the welfare of the nation, the life of the humanities in American education.

Nine university and college teachers gave their unqualified support to the proposal.<sup>2</sup> Mr. A. W. Vaughan states that others in the English department of Alabama College share his enthusiasm but are somewhat more skeptical than he that the proposed procedure would be effective. He expresses his own conviction as follows:

If the proposal represents primarily an effort to salvage a particular type of institution, there is reason to doubt the validity or the effectiveness of the plan to ask for a special commission. But if it seeks to accomplish an unrestricted study of the danger to all liberal education in the United States, it should be supported by all educators in the high school as well as in the college.

Miss Pound subscribes to the document in spite of some hesitation at the thought of asking for another commission. Better reduction of commissions than increase of them, she says; but she concludes that "the suggestions at the close of the article seem practical, probably the wisest that may be made, and desirable. I think of nothing to substitute or to add." Mr. Ernest E. Leisy does not hesitate: "Let me say as one of

<sup>2</sup> The number includes Ernest Bernbaum, Oscar James Campbell, Ernest C. Hassold, Merritt Y. Hughes, Dayton Kohler, Ernest E. Leisy, Louise Pound, Allen Tate, and A. W. Vaughan.

those who 'suffered' under SATC that I hope we will have no repetition of that farce. . . . By all means let us have a commission which shall see to it that our citadel of freedom, the liberal arts college, is preserved."

#### Allen Tate believes:

It is nonsense to say that we cannot afford to keep the Liberal Arts during a war. If we do not keep them, it will be because we are fighting one slave state in order to establish another. . . . The academic profession in America, being secretly disillusioned of its own value, in time of war commits suicide in order to prove that it has a "function." We shall give up the Liberal Arts so that Vice-President Wallace may give to every Chinese a quart of milk a day. If we succumb to this childish barbarism, we shall not have deserved the privilege of fighting slavery in Germany, since we shall have fought to establish slavery for ourselves.

Mr. Merritt Y. Hughes approves the proposal and adds the suggestion that any commission which may be set up should consider the desirability of establishing generous facilities for the study of foreign languages by large numbers of our soldiers in the armistice which must soon come. This plan was successfully adopted in 1919 and should be used again.

Three replies<sup>3</sup> assent to the numbered statements at the beginning of the proposal but express some differences of opinion. Mr. Hibbard says: "One action I hope the government will take: Single out a group of able men and women, put them in uniform if need be, and train them intensively in the humanities for after-the-war activities."

Mr. Stovall and Mr. Reynolds agree on the importance of the question, hesitate to approve the appointment of a commission, and think that we should not ask deferment of students or instructors in the humanities. Mr. Reynolds' view is best represented by the following paragraph from his letter:

My main interest is in securing recognition in the plans for training the men, especially prospective officers, of the importance of the Hu-

<sup>3</sup> From Addison Hibbard, George F. Reynolds, and Floyd Stovall. Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Stovall speak for themselves and their colleagues.

manities, especially the literature of Democracy. The *New York Times* is emphasizing the need of training in United States History. Quite as important is acquaintance with the expression of democratic ideas in literature that appeals to the emotions. So far as I have noticed, little has been done about this. It is a delicate and difficult job but most important. There has been much comment on the lack of enthusiasm for this war. An honest enthusiasm can only arise from an enthusiasm for the ideas we are fighting for, and that can be stirred most effectively by literature. I hope, therefore, that such training may be given official recognition. The precise manner in which such training can best be supplied depends so largely on local conditions that perhaps the only general provision can be to allow some time for it.

Seven of the college teachers rejected the proposal as futile, ill advised, or based on false assumptions.<sup>4</sup> Speaking for the members of his department, Mr. J. Milton French agrees that "the humanities are among the chief guardians of our cultural and social heritage" but feels that we should not run the danger of seeming to ask for special privileges at a time when sacrifices are necessary:

Strongly as we recognize the value of these subjects, we realize at the same time that at the present moment guns are more vital than novels, and tanks more immediately effective than poems. Most of us therefore feel convinced that for the time being we must expect to reduce courses in literature in colleges radically and to devote most of our time as teachers of English to the more prosaic and utilitarian task of teaching composition to soldiers, either actual or prospective. We seriously question whether this reduction in our curriculum will be more than temporary. If we felt that it would jeopardize our position as guardians of the humane tradition after the war is over, we should fight tooth and nail to preserve every course possible; but we believe that, when the war is over, the revulsion from materialism and utilitarianism will be so strong that there will be a tremendously increased demand for the humanities. It is then that our departments will again come into their own.

<sup>4</sup> The seven are Roy P. Basler, Earl Daniels, J. Milton French, James H. Hanford, J. H. McKee, Robert C. Pooley, and an anonymous easterner.

In a similar vein Mr. Hanford says that he thinks the attitude of the military authorities is as co-operative as could be expected. "The colleges must themselves provide for the carrying-on of their normal functions as best they can. The mobilization of pressure on the government will certainly prove both futile and unwise."

The threat to the humanities, Mr. Basler believes, is more apparent than real and will certainly vanish along with gas rationing when the emergency is over. He thinks that "the vital liberal arts college must survive by exercising its ingenuity and co-operating to meet the needs. . . . To date there is every indication that the humanities are not being discriminated against and that any college worthy of the name will be able to pull in its belt and keep working."

To Mr. Daniels it appears that the humanities would commit hara-kiri by associating themselves with a lobbying movement. Mr. Daniels also objects that "America isn't a last stronghold," and he considers the paragraph in the proposal which maintains the contrary to be "narrowly chauvinistic." Those who are going to make the peace were long since educated by us; therefore, it's almost nonsense to talk about what we teach now having much effect on the future peace.

To Mr. McKee the issue defined by the proposal is not real:

Let us not worry about inevitable technology. Our war-made technologists, our emergency technologists may not be permanently dehumanized. They probably will come home from Casablanca with a great longing for wives, children, alligator pears, Arab architecture, books, pictures (and movies). Provide the proper economic system and the humanities will take care of themselves.

Between 1918 and 1941 we teachers had plenty of chance to show what our contribution was toward "winning a peace," and the record is not one to shout about. Therefore, an anonymous easterner thinks, we are in no position to say: "Let somebody else win the war; we liberal arts people must devote our-

selves to preparation for winning the peace." Will teaching *Beowulf* make the world better, or the *Gull's Horn-Book*? "No," he says, "I think the liberal arts college has to sail in the same boat with coffee, automobiles, silk stockings, and summer trips to the British Museum. After we've licked Hitler and the Japs, we can go back to the luxuries of debating what T. S. Eliot meant, or why Gertrude Stein is a great writer."

Mr. Pooley's reply summarizes the results of a questionnaire given to twenty-eight high-school seniors who had read the proposal. A majority of the youngsters be-

lieve that the liberal arts should be an essential part of the training of young people even in time of war, but they do not think that either students or teachers of liberal arts should be singled out for exemption from the draft. The seniors hope to complete at least two years of nontechnical college work before entering government service. From his experiment Mr. Pooley infers that college students are patriotic but are not carried away by patriotism to the neglect of their chances for education. From an innate sense of fairness many said, "All have to take their chances in war."

### SECONDHAND SHOP

KATHERINE BUXTBAUM<sup>1</sup>

*It suits my fancy, Elia, to find  
Your book among the derelicts in this place.  
A phrase leaps from the page with nimble grace  
Fresh as the day you wrought it; while behind  
That stack of mouldering pamphlets, or that case  
Of leaden tomes, wraithlike, there gleams a face,  
Brooding above some antique folio;  
For thus you haunted bookstalls long ago.*

*The hovering dealer looks with faint disdain  
At the small coin that buys my paltry prize.  
A shabby book indeed, but oh, how plain  
It brings all London back before my eyes:—  
London, without its travail and its pain,  
The London I shall never see again.*

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Iowa State Teachers College.

## ROUND TABLE

### OLD BEN JONSON ON "GRADING" COMPOSITIONS

Yesterday, browsing around in Ben Jonson's too-much-neglected but refreshingly sane *Timber, or Discoveries*; I found the justification, adequately authoritative and satisfactorily convincing, of my handling of what, when I undertook to grade compositions, was the first assault upon my integrity. Anthony Trollope, another unpretentiously sane individual, in his *Autobiography* declares unequivocably that "critical ability for the price we pay is not attainable," and without much stretching of my imagination I have always been willing to infer from that declaration that more than likely first-class grading ability for college composition is probably not attainable either for the price paid the graders!

But the doubtful comfort of this inference is beclouded by Trollope's unchivalrous "but." "But," he continues, "that critics should be honest we have a right to demand, and critical dishonesty we are bound to expose."

Well, on this point, in my very first year of composition teaching, I feared my integrity in danger of compromise. This is how the problem was precipitated upon me. In an advanced class in composition I had digressed somewhat into the field of verse-writing. Most of the resultant verses were so clearly bad that there was no temptation to call them otherwise. But a few were much better. Though not yet very good, they seemed to me to show promise. One of those papers I gave a grade of ninety-five.

Some time later a literary and editorial and truth-minded friend of mine, a lady, came to me and said caustically: "One of your students, Miss Smith, came to me the other day and showed me the grade you gave one of her poems." Directly at this point I was beginning to note a feeling of guilt rising in me.

"Ninety-five, it was," she continued precisely. "Miss Smith was very happy about it. She was beginning to show in her very walk and facial expressions that a new poet had arrived!" Here my informant paused, but, before I had fully cleared my throat for an escape, she added: "And, of course, with considerable curiosity and suspense, I hastened to examine the poem!" Another pause. Then facing me directly, with accusation in her eye, she asked: "Having always been taught to regard you a good judge of literature, may I ask you, please, how could you honestly give that girl a grade of ninety-five for that verse?"

Well, there it was. There it lay suddenly right in my path like Bunyan's Apollyon. How indeed could I grade that poem of Miss Smith's ninety-five? Why, come to think of it, that was almost as high as I would be willing to go on Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes"! Suddenly, the fact that Miss Smith might possibly be regarded by some as the most attractive girl in the class added to the enormity of that ninety-five!

But necessity is the mother of invention, not only in mechanics, but also in philosophy. In this awkward moment under the eye of my editorial friend, a justification for my ninety-five hurriedly formed itself. After some little sparring for time, I said, at last, firmly, that of course Miss Smith's poem was not a masterpiece, that it wasn't to be compared with Keats's "Eve of St. Agnes," for example, and that my mark was not to be considered as a comparison with it.

"When I grade the papers of my students," I said, "my scale is not the norm of perfection of the ages, of Shakespeare and Dante, but of the classroom. I graded Miss Smith's poem as a college classroom exercise, and as such it seemed to me, first of all, one of the best in that class and, secondly, for any similar class anywhere."

This was my answer. But in my heart a

little uneasiness continued to linger. Would Trollope approve my procedure and take it to his bosom as the fully "critical honesty" upon which he insists? And what about Miss Smith? Could she be expected to understand that my mark was only relative and not absolute—that the grade did not mean "this is ninety-five per cent good" but only "considering that you are only a sophomore, this is good"?

Now, after reading Ben Jonson—whatever Trollope might think about it—I feel my procedure is justified by an authority greater than which one need admit none! Jonson introduced himself on the subject very learnedly in the Latin, "*Precipiendi modi*," as becomes a man who not only killed a man in a duel but also said of one whose memory he honored this side of idolatry that "he knew little Latin and less Greek"!

He begins by stating that he takes "this labor in teaching others" so that some day they may no longer need instruction but shall be putting his "precepts into practice." Wisely, however, lest some should never be able to put his precepts into practice, and so he be blamed for instructing poorly, he protects himself, as many a teacher perhaps would but may not. He says:

But arts and precepts avail nothing, except nature be beneficial and aiding. And therefore these things are no more written to a dull disposition than rules of husbandry to a barren soil. No precepts will profit a fool, no more than beauty will the blind, or music the deaf.

Alas, too true, that!

And then he comes to my point. Granted that "nature be beneficial and aiding," he will gladly take pains to teach them how to write, and he will do so gently. In teaching youth, he says,

a master should temper his own powers, and descend to the other's infirmity. If you pour a glut of water upon a bottle, it receives little of it; but with a funnel, and by degrees, you shall fill many of them, and spill little of your own; to their capacity they will all receive and be full.

A most apt analogy, and insisting again, by the way, that the particles of John Q. Av-

erage will never be so reliable as those of Phi Beta Kappa.

Touching also is that grizzly old duelist when he says:

No more would I tell a green writer all his faults, lest I should make him grieve and faint, and at last despair. For nothing doth more hurt than to make him so afraid of all things as he can endeavor nothing.

No wonder the poetic young blades of his day loved him. No wonder Herrick cried:

My Ben,  
Or come again,  
Or send to us,  
Thy wit's great overplus:  
    But teach us yet  
    Wisely to husband it. . . .

Ben Jonson is not to be misunderstood here. Clearly one must not overwhelm a freshman with all his many faults. But what, you ask, if a grade is to be given? Will one, while mercifully glossing with one's left hand some of the young hopeful's many faults, set him down with the other hand a sickeningly depressing grade?

No, indeed. And here comes the grand justification of that embarrassing ninety-five of my first green days of teaching. Jonson says:

I will like and praise some things in a young writer which yet, if he continue in, I cannot but justly hate him for the same. There is a time to be given all things for maturity, and that even your country-husbandman can teach, who to a young plant will not put the pruning knife, because it seems to fear the iron, as not able to admit the scar.

There it is. To the sophomore who merely and painfully manages to make a dozen lines rhyme and scan correctly, I may give a high mark; these same lines from a professional poet I would set down as the shamedlest doggerel! And I needn't do it with a furtive look in my eyes or armed with a sly scheme for dodging old Anthony Trollope when Time's winged chariot shall cause me to spy him on the other side of the Styx!

And the next time my April freshman complains that apparently he hasn't improved at all, since in November I graded

him passing and now he is still only passing,  
I will step forth confidently and read old  
Jonson to him—but gently and tactfully—  
and soft-pedalling that about nature being  
“beneficial and aiding”!

AUSTIN J. APP

FORMERLY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SCRANTON  
NOW IN THE ARMY

### ESSAY IN MINIATURE

#### ONOMATOPOETIC PREFERENCES

Like a great verse, an onomatopoetic verse can be superb only to him who finds it so. But everyone enjoys “The moan of doves in immemorial elms,/And murmuring of innumerable bees.” Almost equally famous is the brilliant precision of Browning’s “quick sharp scratch and blue spurt of a lighted match”; only relatively less delightful is the too conscious artifice in “the silken, sad, uncertain rustling” of Poe’s curtains. If ever so little accentuation, however, be given to the faintly hissing sibilants of “The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,/The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves,” Keats’s verse will be an easy favorite.

Perhaps the exquisitely perfect adjustment of sound and sense in these verses is the sole source of our keen esthetic pleasure. But the verse from Keats, being the most subtle, must again appear the finest if a part of this pleasure lies in the beauty or force of the concept itself. And it can easily retain its place against such skilfully wrought but more obvious verses as “By whispering winds soon lulled asleep,” “While rocking winds are piping loud,” and perhaps even “the far-off curfew sound/Over some wide-watered shore,/Swinging slow with sullen roar.”

To favor Keats, however, over so powerfully imaginative and so skilfully executed a verse as Milton’s

On a sudden open fly,  
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,  
The infernal doors, and on their hinges  
grate  
Harsh thunder,

perhaps requires a degree of irrational obstinacy. But Virgil, also a master of vast concepts and an even greater artist than Milton, seems to rise to clear pre-eminence in such passages as

Illi indignantes magno cum murmure montis  
circum claustra fremunt,

and

Haec ubi dicta, cavum conversa cuspide montem  
impulit in latus; ac venti, velut agmine facto,  
qua data porta, ruunt et terras turbine perflant.

But Milton possesses still more thunder, which

Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,  
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now  
To bellow through the vast and boundless Deep.

Byron matches or excels both in one magnificent verse:

Far along, the rattling crags among  
Leaps the live thunder!

All this amounts only to a kind of foot race among poets for an onomatopoetic bay. And for this, Byron, with his mountain thunder echoing among the rattling crags, is perhaps the most eligible. But another race may be, with Homer and Dante entered for the next heat, and other bays be won. It seems quite clear, however, that superb onomatopoeia is either double piano or double forte and that bees, wind (whether it is a barely audible breath or a furious gale), and thunder are its almost indispensable properties.

ANDREW J. GREEN  
LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

## CURRENT ENGLISH FORUM

ALBERT H. MARCKWARDT, J. G. PERRIN, AND J. B. McMILLAN

Please explain the usage and state the part of speech of each of the first three words in the following sentence: "Three times ten equals thirty."

P.S.

Both Webster's and the Oxford dictionaries list this specialized use of the noun *time*. As the dictionaries point out, the idiom contains the noun in the plural, preceded by a cardinal numeral, and followed by an expression of quantity. The word *times* is merely a verbalization of  $\times$ , the symbol of multiplication; the whole phrase is a substantive, subject of the verb *equals*. The usage dates from late Middle English. Any further analysis of the phrase into "parts of speech" is a waste of time, as is the analysis of many, many idioms. After all, what we do in naming parts of speech is to put a word in a class of words which have similar characteristics. Since there is no group of words which have the same characteristics as any of the three in *three times ten*, there is no good reason to analyze the idiom.

J. B. McM.

Our high-school library would like to have a list of references to published articles on new words coined as a result of World War II.

M. B. B.

Articles and war word lists are appearing in great numbers, particularly in newspapers and popular magazines. The best way to keep up with the subject is to read the bibliography in each issue of the magazine *American Speech*. Also in this magazine appears a department called "Among the New Words," edited by Dwight L. Bolinger, in which coinages and new meanings are listed. A recent book that might be useful is Elbridge Colby's *Army Talk* (Princeton Uni-

versity Press, 1942). Articles have appeared in *Coronet* (May, 1942), pp. 81-86; *Saturday Evening Post* (May 9, 1942), p. 42; and *Saturday Review of Literature* (June 20, 1942), p. 7, and (October 4, 1941), p. 42. A "Glossary of Army Slang" was published by *American Speech* in its October, 1941, issue.

J. B. McM.

Please comment on the correct or incorrect use of "retiring" in this sentence: "The executive committee shall consist of the officers, the retiring president, and the members elected from each school."

F. G. B.

Originally a "retiring president" was presumably a president whose successor had been nominated or elected but not installed or inaugurated. As soon as he left office, he would become a *past* or *ex-president*. It has long been a custom of organizations to use the term *retiring president* when the officer was appointed to committees or given certain duties which would terminate at or before the installation of his successor, as, for instance, at conventions. The extension of the term to mean *immediate past president*, as in your sentence, probably results from the extension of the committees or duties involved beyond the original limits. The process of extension of meaning is perfectly normal in English. Some people will object to this particular semantic change as being a careless misuse of words, but the fact that it causes no ambiguity and that the people who use it are ordinarily among the educated groups will probably insure its acceptance. *Immediate past president* would be more precise and conventional.

J. B. McM.

Recently I have encountered the compounds "out-migration" and "in-migration" where I

*would have expected "emigration" and "immigration." Are these words acceptable?*

P. N. H.

They are perfectly acceptable, since both *out* and *in* are free combining prefixes, and their combination with *migration* is regular enough. The existence of the older synonyms does not affect the new forms, particularly since it is likely that confusion of *immigration* with *emigration* produced the new forms. This is an excellent example of how similarity in pronunciation or spelling between antonyms can require new, more distinct expressions. It is true that most English words beginning with *m* do not take *in* as a prefix, but assimilate it to *im*; however, the existence of *inmate*, *inmesh*, and other exceptions to the general pattern makes *in-migration* possible.

J. B. McM.

*Please tell me what kind of a sentence the following is: "We had a good time, didn't we?" I have run across this type of sentence constantly in dialogue, and it is always written as a single sentence. Should it really be two sentences? Although two distinct thoughts are expressed in it, I cannot make it compound*

*because I cannot think of any conjunction that would fit into it as a hinge.*

W. L.

The punctuation survey in *Current English Usage* by S. A. Leonard, Monograph No. 1 of the National Council of Teachers of English, upholds the punctuation of the question-tag type of sentence with a comma by a definite although not overwhelming majority over punctuation with a semicolon. Of seventy-six publishers who indicated their judgments on this problem, fifteen required the comma and thirty preferred it; ten required the semicolon and sixteen preferred it. There is, of course, no necessity for making two sentences, since the semicolon is a recognized compounding point when there is no grammatical connective.

In view of your own statement, interpreting a sentence of this type as having two distinct thoughts, the comment of the editors (p. 33) is of interest: "[The final clause] is evidently felt not to be a full question but an expletive—an afterthought subordinate in meaning to the main statement; and hence is separated from it by the lighter point."

A. H. M.

## NEWS AND NOTES

### THE COUNCIL MEETS IN WARTIME

The 1942 annual meeting of N.C.T.E. was successful beyond all expectations. The two sessions of the Board of Directors were attended by forty and thirty-eight directors, respectively, besides spectators. This was more than half the average attendance for the last five years. The annual business meeting (of all Council members) was little smaller than usual. Fortunately, John J. De Boer, president of the Council, had been asked by the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction (N.E.A.) to arrange a fall regional conference for that organization, and he persuaded his local committee to place it at Thanksgiving in the Palmer House in Chicago, where the Council meetings were held. Many from outside the city thus found their trip doubly valuable. For example, at one session of this conference N.C.T.E. Past-Presidents R. C. Pooley and Dora V. Smith were the featured speakers.

Elected as the new officers of the Council were: Max J. Herzberg, president; Angela Broening, first vice-president; Lennox Grey, second vice-president; W. Wilbur Hatfield, secretary-treasurer; John J. De Boer, member of the Executive Committee.

The annual business meeting (all members) devoted itself to the consideration of important amendments to the constitution. The proposal to have officers nominated by an informal mail ballot of the Board of Directors and elected by mail ballot of all the members of the Council was debated at length and finally laid on the table until next November. The Executive Committee was directed to give this proposal wide publicity during the year before it comes to a vote. Each member of the Board as listed in the Council office in September would re-

ceive a nominating ballot blank and would name one person for each office and six for directors-at-large. The names of the three leading candidates for each office, and of the eighteen for directors, would be placed on the final ballot to be mailed to all members in November. On this final ballot the candidates with the most votes, not necessarily a majority, would be elected. The supporters of the amendment argue democracy and wartime conditions; its opponents question its efficiency.

Constitutional amendments were adopted (1) permitting the election of officers by a mail ballot of the directors in any year when an annual meeting is impossible, (2) reducing annual dues to \$2.50 for those who take the *Elementary English Review* as their membership magazine, and (3) permitting amendments to the constitution by a majority of the votes cast in a mail ballot submitted to all Council members. The first and third of these changes are designed to guard against emergencies that may arise.

New directors-at-large, to serve for three years, are: Mary D. Reed, State Teachers College, Terre Haute, Indiana; Amanda M. Ellis, Colorado College, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fred Walcott, University of Michigan; Reed Smith, University of South Carolina; Harold A. Anderson, University of Chicago; Helene W. Hartley, Syracuse University. Rabun L. Brantley, University System of Georgia Center, Atlanta, Georgia, will complete the term of James H. Mason, Arkansas, resigned to do war work.

Advisers to the editor of the *English Journal* are: Elizabeth Carney, Colorado State College of Education, Greeley, Colorado; Marguerite Blough, East High School, Waterloo, Iowa; George Murphy, formerly of Humboldt State College, Arcata, California, now in the Army; Virginia Smith, West Fulton High School, Atlanta, Georgia;

Alice V. Brower, A. B. Davis High School,  
Mount Vernon, New York.

The Board of Directors considered the reports of twenty-three committees (others reported only to the Executive Committee). It debated the crucial problem of meeting the English needs of high-school students when principals are so much disposed to reduce English time in order to expand technical training (see recent *English Journal* articles by Max J. Herzberg and Lennox Grey). All felt that we must not be concerned about our own vested interests but work solely for the welfare of our students and of society. The discussion ended with the adoption of the following motion offered by Lennox Grey:

That the Board of Directors recommend to the Planning Commission and the Executive Committee.

1. That the major undertaking of the National Council the coming year be the mobilization of English teachers in a program which will stress maintaining and improving *communication* as a wartime service.

2. That to this end the Planning Commission work out ways of co-ordinating the activities of various National Council committees.

3. That the Committee on the Place of English in American Education be authorized to treat with organizations outside the National Council (e.g., Office of Education, Office of War Information, O.C.D., Commission on Co-operative Curriculum Planning, etc.) to co-ordinate our work with theirs in such ways as are compatible with the policies of the National Council, and as have the approval of the Executive Committee of the National Council.

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#### REPORT OF THE RESOLUTIONS COMMITTEE OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH<sup>1</sup>

As English teachers we are mobilized for war, to preserve the values and ideals created and perpetuated by free men. It is our patriotic function—one to which we gladly devote ourselves—to do all we can to help win the war.

<sup>1</sup> Approved and adopted by the Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of English meeting in Chicago on November 27, 1942.

As English teachers we are, moreover, especially equipped to play a vital part in a well-coordinated program of communication, which is the basic art of everyday expression and reading.

English has been performing and must continue to perform an indispensable service in interpreting the aims, purposes, and progress of the war in assisting through speech activities in all civilian war work, and in building morale (as important as military drill) through reading and discussion.<sup>2</sup>

1. Let us make clear to our students that this is a war of the people against intolerable tyranny and inhumanity; that its purpose is to establish a world of peace, order, and freedom, the bases of which are our concern both now and in the future.

2. Let us re-examine and adjust our courses of study to fit war needs and demands. Let us submit to the proper war agencies instructional materials which will facilitate the work of such projects as the Victory Corps, Pre-induction Programs, and the like.

3. Let us devise procedures to assist governmental agencies in important activities such as the sale of war bonds and stamps, promotion of salvage collections, and the preparation of materials of instruction to explain the need for conservation and rationing.

4. Let us concentrate on teaching reading and listening skills and clear and concise expression.

5. Let us compile useful reading lists and stimulate reading on topics directly connected with the war effort and progress, and with the promotion of tolerance and international understanding.

6. Let us give young people perspective on the ideals for which we are fighting as expressed in the literature on our own nation and of the other nations of the world.

7. Let us stimulate young people to think through the dynamic ideas and ideals for which we fight and to accept these ideals as the object of their personal sacrifice and devotion.

DORA V. SMITH

Chairman

BERT E. BOOTHE

ANGELA M. BROENING

GEORGE G. GATES

MAX J. HERZBERG

HELEN RAND MILLER

MARK NEVILLE

<sup>2</sup> See *The Role of the English Teacher in Wartime: A Report of the Planning Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English*.

## THE PERIODICALS

As the third W. P. Ker memorial lecturer, at the University of Glasgow, in February, T. S. Eliot spoke on "The Music of Poetry." His lecture is published in the November-December *Partisan Review*. In English poetry, he explains, we have a kind of amalgam of metrical systems like the amalgam of races which make up the English. In the poetry of Milton and Tennyson the triumph of versification is the result of Latin measures, thoroughly absorbed by the poets and imposed without artifice upon the English. Rhythms of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Norman French, Middle English, and the Scots have all made their mark upon English poetry, together with the rhythms, at various periods, of French, Italian, and Spanish. From time to time the kind of poetry we get is determined by the influence of one or another contemporary literature, or by circumstances which make one period of our own past more sympathetic than another, or by the prevailing emphasis in education. But one law of nature is more powerful than any of these varying currents: the law that poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear.

The music of poetry depends upon the meaning. Even though poetry attempts to convey something beyond what can be conveyed in prose rhythms, it remains one person talking to another. Wordsworth at one time, Dryden at another, represent the return to common speech periodically necessary to the health of poetry.

It would be a mistake to assume that all poetry should be melodious. Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place, and in any poem of length there must be prosaic transitions between passages of greater and less intensity. What matters, in short, is the whole poem, the context which makes particular words beautiful. Sound, thought of as the musical element of poetry, is as much an abstraction from the poem as the sense.

Since Shakespeare, dramatic verse has been lacking in the power it reached under

his command. From Otway to Browning dramatic poets failed not because they lacked plot or anything called "theater" but because their rhythm of speech cannot be associated with any human being except a poetry reciter. One reason for this decline is that great writers of blank verse since Shakespeare have written nondramatic poetry. After Milton even Shakespeare would have had to discover a different medium.

At some periods the task of the poet is to explore the musical possibilities of an established convention in the relation of verse and speech. At other periods the task is to catch up with the changes in colloquial speech. In his first period Shakespeare slowly adapted his form to colloquial speech; in his second period, after *Antony and Cleopatra*, he moved from suppleness and simplicity to the elaboration of the verse in the last plays. For the last twenty years poets have experimented to find a proper colloquial idiom. We still have far to go to find a colloquial verse medium for the theater, but when it is found a period of musical elaboration can follow.

A poet can gain much from the study of music—the sense of rhythm and the sense of structure, the use of recurrent themes, and possibilities of contrapuntal arrangement of subject matter.

The history of the teaching of American literature in our colleges and universities began about 1872, when Moses Coit Tyler, at the University of Michigan, proposed that students be allowed to take a course in American history and literature. In the November *Journal of Higher Education* John T. Flanagan outlines the progress of American literature teaching from Tyler's proposal to the present. As late as 1900, institutions were rare which offered any work in the field beyond the preliminary survey course. At Wisconsin, as early as 1893, John C. Freeman offered a course in American prose masterpieces, and a little later William B. Cairns held the title of "assistant professor of American literature." At Pennsylvania

State College, in 1894, Fred L. Patee began his career as professor of American literature. After 1900 the movement spread to instruct students in the literary history of their own country. Barrett Wendell, at Harvard, emphasized the literary work of Harvard graduates, by 1911 Bliss Perry was devoting a whole term to Emerson, and about 1912 Arthur Hobson Quinn offered specialized work in the drama and the novel.

World War I might be considered a transitional point in the attitude of our colleges and universities toward American literature. Since 1918 the survey course has become an intrinsic part of the college curriculum. Beyond the survey course, the study of American literature has gradually expanded to include (1) period courses, (2) type courses, (3) courses in the work of one or two men (Franklin, Emerson, Thoreau, Twain, Whitman, Lowell, Melville, Hawthorne, Poe, Adams, and James), and (4) courses in regional literature, which are now offered by the universities of Maine, Iowa, Oregon, North Carolina, Alabama, Louisiana, New Mexico, and Texas. The universities like Princeton and Johns Hopkins, where the philological tradition has been strong, have been reluctant to offer graduate work in American literature; but the increasing prestige of living American writers, the clarification of values in the older literature, and the rise of America to cultural leadership demand attention from colleges which would be farsighted and progressive.

In recent years common protests have been made against the sway of the naturalist method in fiction. Younger writers are stirred by the ambition to create a new type of imaginative prose into which the recognizably real enters as one component rather than as the total substance. The reaction against naturalism, however, may fail to benefit fiction if writers neglect to study the solid contribution of naturalism to literature or if they do not discriminate between naturalism and realism. In the November-December *Partisan Review* Philip Rahv makes these distinctions.

A novelist would be mistaken to depend upon philosophical analysis for the solution of his problem, for imaginative writing cannot include fixed and systematic definitions of reality without violating its own existential character. One cannot but agree with Henry James that the supreme value of fiction consists in its air of reality, which comes from the immense and exquisite correspondence of fiction with life. Naturalism, which may be defined as that type of realism in which the individual is wholly determined by his environment, goes to an extreme by representing man as in a continuous waking state of prosaic daily living. It deals with the broadly typical, allowing very little for the unique or unexpected in character and very little for self-awareness on the part of characters. It removes the possibility of a tragic resolution of experience. Surrealist fiction such as that by Franz Kafka's imitators, on the other hand, represents man as immured in dreams. The writers take the recognizable world apart, but they do not put it back together again in such a way as to make us recognize their creative contradictions. Reality is not a species of material that the fiction writer can either use or dispose of as he sees fit; it functions as the discipline of fiction.

From Balzac and the Goncourts to Dreiser and Dos Passos, naturalist fiction has served to destroy conventional falsehood and inhibition in literature, to open up many aspects of reality to the artist, to make honest speaking possible. Its present condition, however, is one of utter debility. The spirit of discovery has gone from it and it has lost the power to cope with the ever growing element of the problematical in life. Through the influence of contemporary psychology, furthermore, literature recovers its inwardness, devising such forms as the interior monologue which combines the naturalistic in its minute description of the mental processes with the antinaturalistic in its disclosure of the subjective and the irrational. Naturalism cannot hope to survive the world of nineteenth-century science and industry which produced it. Its decline, how-

ever, is not the same as decline in the principle of realism, which is the most valuable acquisition of the modern mind. Realism has taught literature how to grasp and encompass the ordinary facts of human existence.

It is hard to be a novelist in 1942. Fiction has become more like nonfiction. The eye has replaced the mind and the notebook the intelligence. Increasingly fiction becomes biography, history, economics, sociology, politics, even meteorology. People are drugged by information, too much of which has only confused them. In the magazines the proportion of fiction has dwindled from as much as 40 per cent to only a story or two per issue. Since 1929 the *Publisher's Weekly* shows a decline in the number of fiction books published annually from twenty-seven million to less than fifteen million. As the nonfiction books have displaced the fiction, they have become more readable, borrowing fictional techniques. Verisimilitude, which used to be a means of making plausible implausible fictions, now becomes a way of making plausible implausible facts. But there is rarely much synthesis of the facts; we live in an age of things, not of ideas, and journalism, not fiction, is the true literature of fact.

These are the more material aspects of the condition of fiction as reviewed by Wallace Stegner in the December *Harper's*. Turning to the spiritual aspects, one may first observe that the artist, as in the time of Rousseau or Shelley, continues to be at war with his world. Newton, Darwin, Marx, and Freud have influenced artists to see man as the puppet of natural forces, and the old sanctions of God, the church, a fixed social structure, or romantic love no longer hold. Preciosity in technique may be a sign that the writer has little within himself that he passionately believes and must say; perhaps *Finnegans Wake* is the throes of the dying novel.

We may test the truth of the cynical and the introverted novels by examining our own experience. The family, for example, though

as open to criticism in the time of Sophocles as in the time of Bernard Shaw, goes on. Novelists may have shied away from romantic love, but except in novels Freud and the novelists have done little to the fact of love. The spontaneous and sustained moral indignation against Hitler since 1932 is proof that Christianity is very much alive. World revolution with its economic and scientific changes may have overwhelmed such novelists as Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley in England, but in America the greater vigor of the contemporary novel gives hope of potential strength with which to resist effete ness and despair. In their books American writers can adjust themselves to the world we live in, as they do adjust themselves in fact. They can put their trust not in the grammar of living provided by Newton, Darwin, Marx, and Freud but in the usage of our actual daily lives. Restoring health to fiction, a novelist will see that America is dominated by people, not by forces. Keeping balance, he will write neither a song of praise for an anvil chorus nor a song of negation but will occupy the open space between Whitman and Dos Passos. The reconciliation between the writer and the American family though long delayed seems inevitable, and it will breed a farsighted, positive literature.

After a period of living in seclusion, originally necessitated by an illness which over took him in the midst of active military service, Joel Spingarn delivered, in 1931, a series of New School lectures on literature and the new era. He was ready then to come back actively into literary life, but the younger poets, philosophers, and critics rejected him, and he returned to seclusion. He died in 1939. In the November *Atlantic* Lewis Mumford has published a tribute to this stalwart American critic as an introduction to one of Spingarn's lectures on "Politics and the Poet." In the lecture Spingarn points out that periods of decadence are marked by a tepid love of country. From the French symbolists of the second half of the nineteenth century to the present, writ

ers who bulk large in our imagination—Valéry, Proust, Joyce, and the rest—manifest a profound distaste for politics. This lack of love for country is a symptom of a lack of love for everything else, for love of country symbolizes love of family, home, daily task, and religion—the whole universality of which the individual is a part. To be without love of country is to be without real moral enthusiasm and therefore decadent. In Russia, even though "love of country" were words of contempt with the leaders of the Revolution, a great faith inevitably developed the most profound patriotism anywhere in existence.

Love of country is not the narrow concept called nationalism; it is a symbol of connection with the whole. To live unto himself, as Aristotle said, a man must be either a brute or a god. Without the sense of relation to a *civitas*, the individual loses something of the sense of a universal.

The noblest practical work of man is the art of governing men, or the political art. Our literature has not had a sense of this political reality, and this lack is its greatest bane. Men like Henry James are types of our homelessness which follows the loss of the political sense. And most of the shallow philosophies of our day—mysticism, aestheticism—have their weaknesses in the same source. The great poets of the world have been different: Sophocles was an Athenian general; Dante was an active municipal official; Milton served as Latin secretary; Goethe was prime minister. Shakespeare's plays, not merely the historical ones but *Lear* and *Hamlet*, were fundamentally concerned with political matters. We must arrive at some fundamental faith that will give us again the zeal for great practical achievement; we must acquire the sense that the daily task is a part of the mission of the universe, as men have always felt when they have had a profound faith.

For many obvious reasons playwrights do not ordinarily write reviews of other men's plays. Dramatic criticism is a tough night-by-night job which pays little in contrast

with the earnings of successful playwriting. This fact is unfortunate, however, because the criticism by playwrights themselves is superior. In the December *Theatre Arts* Edith J. R. Isaacs demonstrates the value of such criticism by the example of Bernard Shaw. As Shaw pointed out, the author of a play is the only person who really wants to have it well done in every respect and who thoroughly achieves the first technical qualification of a critic—the determination to have every play as well done as possible. If a man has the critical faculty, it will overcome every not-very-honest desire to help a fellow-artist in distress.

In his early reviews Shaw avoided the trap of seeing other men's work in terms of his own. Disliking Wilde, he could still appreciate the talent and the discipline involved in Wilde's plays. What he fought was stagnation and death in the theater that he saw around him. He was appreciative of Henry Arthur Jones when Jones lifted himself out of the current theatrical rut; he criticized Pinero as false to social progress; he could not bear to see little men making their fortunes while Ibsen was neglected. Henry Irving was his chief target for using a great talent to play cheap melodramas bolstered up with Shakespeare. Great people of the theater, he believed, should take the theater seriously "as a factory of thought, a promoter of conscience, an elucidator of social conduct, an armory against despair and dullness, and a temple of the Ascent of Man."

During his visit to Laputa, Gulliver became interested in the campaign of the scientists against the spoken word as a means of communication. Living their days in silence, the scientists carried about with them a variety of objects by means of which they represented their thoughts. Today the huge encumbrance of 600,000 words in the English language, as Daniel Gibson believes, goes far toward justifying such a drastic step as that of the Laputans. In the *American Scholar* for winter Mr. Gibson raises the question: "How can the increase of 550,000 words since Johnson's time be explained?"

New fields of scientific investigation have called for extensive terminologies. Dispersion and growth of the English-speaking peoples have also created needs for additional words.

With many scientists we have no quarrel, because their knowledge must be exact and because they constantly endeavor to develop their abstractions into a practical application. For most of us the mathematical formulas which Joseph Strauss used in making the Golden Gate Bridge doesn't matter; the enduring structure is enough. In the pseudosciences, however, we have cause for complaint. Advertising unnecessarily and deceitfully sells not by the idea but by the Word ("Does *your* toothpaste contain irium?"). False barriers of words stand between us and the meaning of much that passes for psychology in newspapers, magazines, and books. The word "complex" has no more meaning as a description of a mental habit than the college boy's epithet "swell."

The worst offender, however—worst because it patently should have no scientific pretensions—is education as it is taught in American colleges of education. Gems of the strange erudition from this source might be quoted at length: "isochronic equation," "P.E. of *r*," "skewness," "Pressy X-O Test," "sibship," "zero-order coef. of corr.," and other coefficients—dozens of them. Mr. Gibson presents a variety of somewhat maliciously chosen examples of trivialities in the field of educational research, all trickily attired in the most pompous jargon. He concludes: "Inflation in our verbal currency may be less immediately a catastrophe than in our silver but in some manifestations is equally a reflection of insolvency."

For the use of both college and high-school teachers, Edward F. Potthoff has compiled a spelling list by making a composite of the lists appearing in twenty textbooks for college courses in composition. The composite list, which is published in the *Illinois English Bulletin* for November, contains 2,121 words. Mr. Potthoff indicates the frequency of each word in the textbooks and the position which each word occupies in the *Horn Basic Writing Vocabulary* and in the *Thorndike Teacher's Word Book of 20,000 Words*.

#### FROM THE HEBREW

The camel walked a long road before he found a resting-place in the English language. The word "camel" was adopted from the Semitic, first by the Greek, whence it found its way into Latin, and after that into the languages of northern Europe.

Other Hebrew or Semitic words have been adopted with little change into our language because they, like "camel," could not very well be translated. Names and concepts peculiar to one people are generally adopted into the languages of other peoples without change.

Many biblical words which were originally part of the Hebrew system of theology have, since the rise of Christianity, made themselves so much a part of our speech that we might almost claim them for our own.

A partial list of such words would include: "mammon," "cassia," "rabbi," "cherub," "seraph," "beulah," "hallelujah," "hosanna," "ophir," "sack," "satan," Jehovah," "zion," "behemoth," and "bethel."

EPSY COLLING  
INKSTER, NORTH DAKOTA

## BOOKS

### REPORT OF A JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE FACULTY OF HARVARD COL- LEGE AND OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

In 1939 a committee<sup>2</sup> representing the faculty of Harvard College and the Graduate School of Education began its study of secondary education; and in February of 1942 it submitted its report to the president of Harvard University in the form of a 173-page book.

The report has to do specifically with the training of teachers for the secondary school, with attention focused on the teaching of English; but while the specific recommendations concern the reorganization of courses at Harvard, the report as a whole has a much wider significance. At the end of the report the committee suggests the setting-up of a commission to review the whole problem of secondary education in a more far-reaching and thoroughgoing attempt to clarify ends and establish means within a field considered most vital to the preservation of democracy.

The most notable achievement in the report is the breaking-down of the old assumption that the purpose of the high school is to prepare students for college, and the recognition of the obligation for leadership which the colleges of America owe to secondary education. Here is Harvard tradition at its best: "To shoulder its full share of responsibility for the intellectual

<sup>1</sup> *The Training of Secondary School Teachers: Especially with Reference to English.* (Report of a joint committee of the faculty of Harvard College and of the Graduate School of Education.) Harvard University Press. Pp. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Morrison, lecturer in English, acting chairman; Richard Mott Gummere, chairman of Committee on Admission; Henry Wyman Holmes, professor of education, acting dean of Graduate School of Education; Howard Mumford Jones, professor of English, chairman of division of modern languages; Morris Bryan Lambie, professor of government; Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Francis Lee Higginson Professor of History; Robert Ulrich, professor of education; Louis Cappel Zahner, lecturer on the teaching of English.

health of the nation." The committee seems fully awake to the fact that unless a good job is done at this level of education, democracy itself is in peril.

Notable, too, is the frank realization of the bitter conflict between colleges of education and colleges of liberal arts which has blocked educational reform and the sane recognition that neither one can accomplish alone the great task which they share jointly.

Briefly put, the report points out that there is a great deal that is wrong with what we are wont to call the modern trend and that it is time for a sober reflection about the value of what we are doing.

The committee is not unmindful of the intricate and changing relations between the school and the community which have complicated the teaching problem at the secondary level. It does not, however, see fit to condone the confusion of aims, the loss of a clear and recognizable content, and the haphazard experimentation that tends to clutter up the school scene. We are ruled, it seems, by a series of educational clichés and by a "sort of educational specialism"—a utilitarianism which lacks a "primary philosophy competent to clarify the problems involved in harmonizing the ends of education and the means."

Two whole chapters of the report are given over to a discussion of this "Confusion of Aims" and these "Existing Dilemmas" which beset the teacher within the ranks, before the "Possible Aims of Teaching English in the Secondary Schools" are discussed. The fields of oral English, written English, and literature are competently and thoroughly explored and evaluated, at the same time that the dangers of such popular misconceptions as surround creative writing, semantics, correlation, and guidance are intelligently faced.

Having analyzed the needs of the job itself, the committee proceeds to recommend specific curriculum changes in teacher-training courses at Harvard, suggesting both by direct statement and by indirect implication that education in America will be no better than its teachers, and that the great need at the moment is to

attract more able people into the profession of teaching and to train them well.

I recommend the report to all classroom teachers who feel that the tail has been wagging the dog in modern education or—to change my figure—that we have sold our birthright for a mess of projects. The report will give them courage to stand firm against the pseudo-practicality which is rampant and to declare with confidence that "virtue itself turns vice when

misapplied." I recommend it to all administrators who truly believe in democracy and wish to see it triumph in America. And I recommend it to the Council's newly formed curriculum committee for serious study as a contribution of great importance to the future of high-school education.

LUELLA B. COOK

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## IN BRIEF REVIEW

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

### FOR THE GENERAL READER

*Sergeant Nikola: A Novel of the Chetnik Brigades.*  
By Istvan Tamas. Fischer. \$2.50.

When the Nazis blitzed Belgrade, three brothers, all under twenty, escaped to the Black Mountains to join guerrilla bands. A heroic and inspiring story of small groups risking all to fight the Nazis, this Robin Hood tale is distinguished by a fine sense of humor. The author has spent his life in the Balkans.

*The Common Heart.* By Paul Horgan. Harper. \$2.50.

In this novel of New Mexico one senses at once the author's understanding and love for the people of the region. Historical documents are used in the text.

*The Three Bamboos.* By Robert Standish. Macmillan. \$2.75.

Standish has made a psychological and material study of the Japanese since 1853. Four generations of the Furenos family, once powerful and tracing its history back forty-four generations, are symbolic of millions of Japs and their traditions, ambitions, and ruthlessness. Here is an excellent picture of the vindictive Japan which we have failed to evaluate.

*Cradled in Fear.* By Anita Boutell. Putnam. \$2.50.

A bride was taken to her new home—a forbidding old house on the Connecticut shore of Long Island, the Prescott home for generations. The malignancy of the house and its occupants are background for a shivery mystery story.

*The Mountains Wait.* By Theodor Broch. Webb. \$3.00.

The young mayor of Narvik, Norway, a lawyer, philosopher, and patriot rather than a politician, has written a brilliant and sincere account of Narvik's destruction and "protection" by the Nazis. His story is real; it reads like *The Moon Is Down*, but it is not fiction. A study of beginnings, the seizure of Ethiopia, and the laxness of the democ-

racies in accepting their responsibilities adds intensity and perception to his story of why one nation fell.

*Great Modern Catholic Short Stories.* Compiled by Sister Marietta Gable. Sheed & Ward. \$3.00.

Among the many fine recent anthologies this one ranks high. There are twenty-six stories all written by skilled artists: nine stories are about priests, seven about monks, and ten about nuns. Sister Gable has selected them, as she says in her excellent Introduction, because in her judgment they are faithful to the various aspects of the Catholic religious life. She suggests that since the cloistered life is unspectacular, the stories which do justice to it should be written in the Chekov-Mansfield manner.

*Rivers of Glory.* By F. Van Wyck, Mason. Lippincott. \$2.75.

Third in a planned series of four historical novels picturing the impress of the American Revolution upon the maritime people of the thirteen colonies. When completed these volumes will present a vivid panorama of the Revolutionary War on the sea.

*Cross Creek Cookery.* By Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. Scribner's. \$2.50.

Readers of *Cross Creek* will remember several pages devoted to cookery. Now we have from Mrs. Rawlings a volume including three hundred Florida recipes, with menus, good stories, and reminiscences.

*Near Horizons.* By Edwin Way Teale. Dodd, Mead. \$3.75.

As we "take to the woods," to the garden, and to the simple life, such a book as this about wonders in the grass and weedlot widens our horizons. Mr. Teale includes representatives of many insect orders and varieties of widely diversified habits. Rich reading for anyone interested in the insect world.

*Reprisal.* By Ethel Vance. Little, Brown. \$2.50.

Many readers will remember *Escape*, by Ethel Vance, when we could not learn who the author was. Again she writes a vigorous, compassionate story of war-torn Europe.

*America Sings.* By Carl Carmer. Borzoi. \$3.00.

This treasury of song and story has as its theme the building of America and the people who did it. Twenty-nine sections are devoted to different phases of national development. Music arranged by E. J. Stringham. Illustrations in color.

*Crazy Horse.* By Mari Sandoz. Borzoi. \$3.50.

The author of *Old Jules* has written a brilliant biography of the great Sioux who defeated Custer on the Little Big Horn sixty-six years ago. Miss Sandoz acquired much of her material directly from the Indian she knew when she was a child in Nebraska.

*Dust Tracks on a Road.* By Zora Neale Hurston. Lippincott. \$3.00.

A young Negro girl who knew folklore and spirituals as an authentic part of her daily life in remote communities, who won scholarships at Barnard and Columbia, became an anthropologist of note and a gifted writer. Here she tells with gusto the story of her own and her family's life. We recommend the final chapter, "Looking Things Over," to others who look backward—on their own or others' "dust tracks."

*The Chicago.* By Harry Hansen. Farrar & Rinehart. \$2.50.

Without the river there would have been no Chicago, Hansen says: baffling, erratic, reversible river, gateway to the Pacific. In that fine "Rivers of America Series," this is a superb story of the Chicago River, the city, and the Midwest. It is studded with anecdotes of history, past and present, with tales of traders, grafters, politicians, and of great personalities—from Indian outpost to grand opera, from Marquette to Sandberg (and Hansen). Handsomely illustrated.

*For My People.* By Margaret Walker. Yale University Press. \$2.00.

In a foreword Stephen Vincent Benét speaks of a controlled intensity of emotion and a language that, even when it is modern, has the surge of biblical poetry, a deep sincerity, straightforwardness, directness, and reality—all found in this young Negro poet.

*What Does Gandhi Want?* T. A. Raman. Oxford. \$1.25.

The author attempts to analyze Gandhi and answer this question by a careful study of fair and accurate extracts from interviews, speeches, and

articles credited to the enigma—Gandhi. Raman, an Indian journalist, is personally acquainted with Gandhi.

*A Forest World.* By Felix Salten. Bobbs-Merrill. \$2.50.

The author of *Bambi* has written a unique story in *The Forest World* (for adults or children)—a story of the great stag Tambo. Action and scope are broad; the setting includes many creatures.

*Angel Mo and Her Son Roland Hayes.* By Mackinley Helm.

This stimulating biography of the great Negro singer is the tribute of an appreciative friend. It is written in the first person—a "translation" the author calls it—Roland Hayes's own story.

*Good Intentions.* By Ogden Nash. Little, Brown. \$2.00.

A gay and amusing collection of poems by the imitable rhymester. Good for many laughs while doctors are away.

*Vogue's First Reader.* Messner. \$3.50.

"Almost everything by almost everybody of importance." All these pieces were originally printed in *Vogue* and have appeared in no other anthology. Many pieces are "first" articles.

*Behind the Face of Japan.* By Upton Close. Appleton-Century. \$4.00.

Upton Close wrote this book—now revised—in 1934, hoping to convince us that a Pearl Harbor could be averted. Now, he says, there seems no bit of hitherto neglected knowledge more needed than knowledge of what Japan is, of how experienced and tough the people of Japan are, and of what are the hopes of making world citizens out of them. The author knows the Japanese officials very well indeed and he makes a great effort (too great?) to be fair to them.

*A History of Oklahoma.* By Grant Foreman. University of Oklahoma Press. \$3.50.

The territory which became a state in 1907, and was a half-century earlier set aside as a permanent home for the Indian, has a rich and fascinating history, to which the author has done full justice.

*Bombs Away: The Story of a Big Bomber.* By John Steinbeck. Written for the United States Army Air Force. Viking. \$2.50. Sixty photographs.

The A.A.F. enlisted the technique of Steinbeck and gave him access to flying fields and camps that he might report to all interested readers upon the training, heroism, equipment, and intelligence of the nine men who make up the crew flying each big bomber.

*Greenland.* By Vilhjalmur Stefansson. Doubleday. \$3.50.

A companion book to the author's volumes on Iceland is this timely comprehensive study of the large island which now assumes strategic importance as a location for weather forecasting and as an asset for domination of the northern Atlantic. A good end map and large type add to its readability. Emphasis is placed upon Greenland's value as a defense area.

*We Took to the Woods.* By Louise Dickinson Rich. Lippincott. \$2.75.

These modern Thoreaus sought peace and happiness in a northern Maine valley where neighbors were nearly ten miles distant. Quite dependent upon their own resources for six months of the year, they found their daily living of fun and hardship merely toughening. A jolly book, rich in adventurous details. The Riches are *not* escapists or hermits. Illustrations and maps.

*Listen, Hans!* By Dorothy Thompson. Houghton Mifflin. \$2.00.

A collection of radio speeches broadcast by Miss Thompson, with an introduction entitled "The Invasion of the German Mind." Her purpose is "to secure the collaboration of the enemy's forces for his defeat." The German mind, she says, is contradictory, and if it cannot make itself up, we must make it up by force. A brilliant and timely bit of propaganda.

*Alfred Nobel.* By Herta E. Pauli. Fischer. \$3.00.

A vital biography of a strange and puzzling personality. "If in thirty years we shall not have succeeded in reorganizing the world, it will inevitably relapse into barbarism," Nobel wrote in 1893. "A new tyranny, that of the dregs of population, is looming up: one fancies one detects its approaching murmur," he wrote in 1892. The searing disappointment of his life was the use of his invention—dynamite—for the destruction of mankind. This is a fascinating story of a great man's life.

*Prize Stories of 1942.* Edited by Herschel Brickell. Doubleday. \$2.50.

The twenty-fourth Annual O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories, chosen from those printed in magazines this year. A distinguished collection representing the leading writers of today.

*If We Should Fail.* By Marion White. Mill. \$1.50.

A Wake-Up-America, It-Can-Happen-Here book. True stories of what happened in Norway and other countries "protected" by Germany.

*The Company Owns the Tools.* By Henry Vicar. Westminster. \$2.00.

Young Hollis, a garage mechanic, was drawn to the big city factory. He carried with him his own

tools but—. Strikes, riots, and unions figure in his his re-education.

*Old Man River.* By Robert Hereford. Caxton. \$3.50.

Young Louis Roache, from a vantage on the St. Louis levee, watched with fascination the steam-boats, finally attempting to board one as a stow-away. In time he was captain and owner. The author acquired much of his information from an old steamboat captain and tells in first person the story of the rise and fall of river industry on the Mississippi and the Missouri. Adventurous and dramatic, with good print and illustrations, this is a fine addition to any collection of river-books.

*A Treasury of the World's Finest Folksongs.* By Leonard Deutsch. Howell Soskin.

This handsome, beautifully illustrated book is a successor to the *Treasury of American Songs* published two years ago. It represents the folk music of thirty-eight nations, gathered by a man who has devoted his life to this work. Each national section is prefaced with an explanatory note by Dr. Claude Sampson.

#### FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

*The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy.* By William Gaunt. Harcourt, Brace. \$3.00.

In a vivid, graphic style Mr. Gaunt dramatizes the origin of the brotherhood, the personalities, alliances and cross-purposes of the members, and the varied outcomes of the movement. A vigorous and solid book.

*Essays and Studies.* By Members of the English Association. Oxford. Vol. XXVI (1940); Vol. XXVII (1941). \$2.50 each.

Each volume contains six critical and historical essays by English scholars, including Henry Cecil Wyld, Evelyn Simpson, and C. S. Lewis. The subject matter extends from "Aspects of Style and Idiom in Fifteenth-Century English" to "Psycho-analysis and Literary Criticism."

*Shakespeare Studies.* By Elmer Edgar Stoll. Stechert. \$4.00.

Six of the studies in this volume are familiar in earlier publications but are now entirely recast, much altered, and enlarged. These include "The Ghosts," "Shylock," "The Criminals," and "Falstaff." Two of the studies are new: "The Characterization" and "The Comic Method."

*George Whetstone.* By Thomas C. Izard. Columbia University Press. \$3.75.

Beginning with a biographical chapter on his Elizabethan subject, Mr. Izard analyzes each of Whetstone's books in detail, explaining their place in the literary world of Llyl, Sidney, and Gascoigne.

## BOOKS

### REPORT OF A JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE FACULTY OF HARVARD COLLEGE AND OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>

In 1939 a committee<sup>2</sup> representing the faculty of Harvard College and the Graduate School of Education began its study of secondary education; and in February of 1942 it submitted its report to the president of Harvard University in the form of a 173-page book.

The report has to do specifically with the training of teachers for the secondary school, with attention focused on the teaching of English; but while the specific recommendations concern the reorganization of courses at Harvard, the report as a whole has a much wider significance. At the end of the report the committee suggests the setting-up of a commission to review the whole problem of secondary education in a more far-reaching and thoroughgoing attempt to clarify ends and establish means within a field considered most vital to the preservation of democracy.

The most notable achievement in the report is the breaking-down of the old assumption that the purpose of the high school is to prepare students for college, and the recognition of the obligation for leadership which the colleges of America owe to secondary education. Here is Harvard tradition at its best: "To shoulder its full share of responsibility for the intellectual

<sup>1</sup> *The Training of Secondary School Teachers: Especially with Reference to English.* (Report of a joint committee of the faculty of Harvard College and of the Graduate School of Education.) Harvard University Press. Pp. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Morrison, lecturer in English, acting chairman; Richard Mott Gummere, chairman of Committee on Admission; Henry Wyman Holmes, professor of education, acting dean of Graduate School of Education; Howard Mumford Jones, professor of English, chairman of division of modern languages; Morris Bryan Lambie, professor of government; Arthur Meier Schlesinger, Francis Lee Higginson Professor of History; Robert Ulrich, professor of education; Louis Cappel Zahner, lecturer on the teaching of English.

health of the nation." The committee seems fully awake to the fact that unless a good job is done at this level of education, democracy itself is in peril.

Notable, too, is the frank realization of the bitter conflict between colleges of education and colleges of liberal arts which has blocked educational reform and the sane recognition that neither one can accomplish alone the great task which they share jointly.

Briefly put, the report points out that there is a great deal that is wrong with what we are wont to call the modern trend and that it is time for a sober reflection about the value of what we are doing.

The committee is not unmindful of the intricate and changing relations between the school and the community which have complicated the teaching problem at the secondary level. It does not, however, see fit to condone the confusion of aims, the loss of a clear and recognizable content, and the haphazard experimentation that tends to clutter up the school scene. We are ruled, it seems, by a series of educational clichés and by a "sort of educational specialism"—a utilitarianism which lacks a "primary philosophy competent to clarify the problems involved in harmonizing the ends of education and the means."

Two whole chapters of the report are given over to a discussion of this "Confusion of Aims" and these "Existing Dilemmas" which beset the teacher within the ranks, before the "Possible Aims of Teaching English in the Secondary Schools" are discussed. The fields of oral English, written English, and literature are competently and thoroughly explored and evaluated, at the same time that the dangers of such popular misconceptions as surround creative writing, semantics, correlation, and guidance are intelligently faced.

Having analyzed the needs of the job itself, the committee proceeds to recommend specific curriculum changes in teacher-training courses at Harvard, suggesting both by direct statement and by indirect implication that education in America will be no better than its teachers, and that the great need at the moment is to

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